

## Managing Ticks

**By Clark McAlister**

One of the great things about living in this area of the state is the easy access to outdoor recreation. We are just a short drive away from many of the best hiking trails in Georgia. People who frequently enjoy outdoor activities need to be cautious of ticks. They can transmit diseases to humans, but you can protect yourself before they bite.

There are three main tick species that bite humans in Georgia: the Lone Star tick, the American dog tick, and the black-legged tick. Larval ticks, or seed ticks, commonly attach to smaller host animals. They feed, drop off of the host, shed their skin, and develop into an adult stage tick. Adult ticks prefer feeding on larger hosts, such as humans, deer, livestock, and dogs.

Ticks locate hosts by detecting body warmth and carbon dioxide from breathing. Feeding is usually painless to the host, and ticks may stay attached for several days. All stages of the tick can survive up to a year waiting for a host to come by.

Several diseases are known to be transmitted by ticks, including Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Both can be effectively treated with antibiotics if treated in the early stages.

The best way to avoid tick bites is to stay in areas where vegetation is open or maintained below ankle height. Avoid vegetation that brushes against the body, especially the legs.

Wearing long pants can help reduce tick contact with your skin. Tuck pant legs into your socks and tuck your shirt in your belt. This will cause the tick to move up toward your head where you will have a better chance of catching it before it latches on. If a tick gets under your clothing it can be difficult to detect.

Another way to deter ticks are repellants. Look for repellants containing "DEET". There are many brands and formulations available. Liquid formulations of DEET are rubbed onto the skin and can provide several hours of coverage. DEET aerosol cans may be sprayed on clothing as well as skin.

After treating your skin, you may also treat your clothes. Use a repellant with permethrin as the active ingredient. This should be sprayed only on clothes, never on skin. Permethrin is long lasting and will not only repel but also kill ticks. It is best to spray your clothes and let them dry overnight to avoid unwanted exposure to your skin.

You should always thoroughly check your entire body after outdoor activities. If you find a tick, don't grab it and rip it off. Squeezing a tick may inject disease agents into your body. Do not pull it from the 'balloon' end, burn it, or rub petroleum jelly on it. Use fine-tipped tweezers to get close to the skin and grasp the tick's mouthparts to remove the insect. Don't worry too much if any mouthparts remain stuck in your skin. Immediately sterilize the area surrounding the bite.

Don't let the threat of ticks prevent you from enjoying the natural beauty our area has to offer. Follow these simple steps for tick prevention and you can devote all of your time to enjoying nature, not worrying about it.