

NEWS COLUMN

Jeff Lounsbury, Extension Educator/Livestock

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Tick Pressure High This Year

Seventeen tick species are found in South Dakota, the most common being the American dog tick. However, several deer ticks, which can carry Lyme disease have been found in the state, according to Mike Catangui, Extension Entomologist at SDSU. Deer ticks have been reported in several eastern South Dakota counties, most in the last few years.

Ticks are usually found in or near wooded areas where there is growth of grass, weeds or bushy vegetation. Ticks cling to grass, weeds and trees and attach themselves to hosts that walk by. People, livestock, and pets frequenting these areas are most likely to become hosts.

Besides Lyme disease, ticks are also associated with Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia.

Lyme disease is rare in South Dakota, because the primary carrier, the deer tick, is not very populous in the state. A small percent of other tick species are carriers whereas almost 100 percent of deer ticks carry Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is caused by a bacterium. The first symptom to appear is a ring-like rash on the skin where the tick attached. However, this rash occurs on only 60 to 80 percent of victims. Other symptoms include fever, fatigue, chills, headaches, muscle aches and pains.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is caused by an organism that is transferred to humans through tick bites. Only a small percentage of American dog ticks carry the disease, but it's important to be aware of the symptoms of the disease.

Initial symptoms may include a sudden onset of fever, chills, headaches and discomfort similar to flu. Approximately three days after the onset of the fever, a rash typically develops near the ankles and wrists and spreads to other areas of the body within several hours. Immediate treatment after diagnosis usually results in complete recovery.

Tularemia, also called rabbit fever, is caused by a bacterium transferred from a tick bite. Handling tissues of infected animals also can infect hunters.

There are two forms of the disease, a mild illness and a more severe one. If infected, a sore or ulcer develops within 24 to 48 hours at the site of the tick bite, lymph glands become swollen and painful. Fever will diminish within 4 weeks in a mild case of tularemia. A more serious form of the disease leads to fever with chills, headache and abdominal pain.

To reduce the likelihood of a tick bite, it is recommended that you wear long-legged pants and light-colored clothing when hiking or walking in wooded, grassy areas. It is also advised to tuck pant legs into boots or socks to force ticks to crawl up the outside of clothing in search of an area of skin to attach to. Light colors make it easier to spot ticks on clothing.

An insect repellent containing DEET (N, N-Diethyl-metatolaumide) may be applied to clothing or permethrin may be applied only on the clothing fabric before being worn to help reduce the risk of a tick infestation.

A tick can be removed using a tweezers or blunt forceps. Fingers may be used if tweezers or forceps aren't available. Grasp the tick firmly and as close to the skin as possible and remove with a steady pull away from the skin, taking care not to squeeze the contents of the tick into your system.

Hot objects, vaseline or alcohol will only stimulate salivation of the tick and increase the chance of disease transmission, instead of aiding in removal.

Keep grass mowed short to reduce hiding places of ticks and expose them to the hot sun. Various labeled insecticides are also available as residual treatments to be applied to grassy areas that will effectively reduce tick numbers.

Many products are available to treat pets for tick infestations. Tick collars, dusts and dips will help keep ticks off of pets. No method is fool proof, though. Ticks should be hand-picked from pets frequently. Contact your local veterinarian for pet treatments. Several products are also available at most discount department stores.