

# 12 Myths and Misconceptions About Ticks

*By Dan Wolff*

After months of lockdown because of the pandemic, countless Americans are flocking outdoors to enjoy parks, hiking trails, gardens and beaches. We're all seeking fresh air, exercise and fun.

Unfortunately, ticks are out also - in force, and in every state. And that means your chances of being bitten by a tick are also high.

There is a lot of misinformation about how to avoid, find, remove and dispose of ticks. To protect yourself, your family and your pets, it's important to know how to stay tick-safe. What follows are the most common myths, misconceptions and truths about ticks.

"We have been studying and educating about ticks for many years," said Dr. Stephen Rich Professor of Microbiology and Director of the [Laboratory of Medical Zoology at the University of Massachusetts](#) in Amherst, MA. What follows is some very accurate information about these blood sucking creepy crawlies.

## **1- Myth You only need to worry about ticks in the summer, and only in certain parts of the country.**

**Fact:** Unfortunately, ticks thrive year-round and they're found in all 50 states. You are at highest risk of getting a tick bite in the spring and early summer because easy to miss microscopic nymphal stage ticks are out and about. Larger adult ticks are out in the fall and winter and also transmit tick-borne diseases.

Cold doesn't kill them. Ticks don't exactly hibernate; they lay dormant in winter. They've been seen crawling through snow in February. Climate changes also are allowing ticks to spread. They are gross and they carry more than [15 diseases](#) according to the CDC, and include bacteria, viruses and parasites. Although it's rare in the US, certain types of ticks can even cause paralysis, according to [Harvard Health](#).

## **2. Myth: Ticks only live in wooded areas. I'm safe from ticks at the beach.**

**Fact:** Nope! You don't need to be in a heavily wooded area to pick up a tick. And we're not the only species who go to the beach. Ticks hide in the bushes, ground cover and in beach dunes.

To avoid ticks, only walk on open sand and don't brush up against beach grass.

## **3. Myth: You have to be near deer to be exposed to deer ticks.**

**Fact:** Untrue. You may think you are safe from ticks if you don't see any deer. But deer are not the only tick hosts.

Ticks feed on pretty much whatever moves, including mice, birds, chipmunks, raccoons, squirrels, birds and even reptiles. Ticks have been around for millions of years so they've had plenty of time to find the best places to live. Their natural enemies include opossums, guinea hen and wild turkeys, but they feed on them too.

**4. Myth: A tick can jump onto you from a tree.**

**Fact** - Ticks can't jump or fly, although they've been known to climb up trees or hide in a tree trunk. Ticks generally wait patiently on or close to the ground for prey (like you or your pet). Then they take hold onto your skin or clothes, or your pet's fur, before attaching its skin.

**5. Myth: You'll feel it if a tick bites you.**

**Fact** - Ticks secrete a numbing agent when they bite you so you won't feel it. In fact, you may never realize that a tick attached and bit you. Fewer than 50% of Lyme patients recall a tick bite.

That's why thorough **daily tick checks** are crucial for you, your family and your pets. [Here's](#) our video on how to do a tick check on yourself, your family and your pets, including what to do if you find a tick.

**6. Myth: Ticks can smell blood.**

**Fact**- What ticks actually detect is carbon dioxide, ammonia in sweat and heat from potential hosts. Your breath is their favorite scent and no amount of insect repellent can hide it. Once they sense CO<sub>2</sub> or sweat (and some ticks have very fine sensory organs) they crawl towards the source. They can sense even the slightest movement and begin to detect you from 50 feet or more away.

Some ticks will perch themselves on grasses or brush with their sticky little legs outstretched, just waiting for a host to walk by. If you brush against them, they board you.

**7- Myth: A tick that bites you has to remain attached for 24-36 hours to transmit disease-causing pathogens.**

**Fact** - While that might be true for certain tick-borne diseases, an infected tick can transmit deadly Powassan in a matter of minutes. The length of time a tick stays attached depends on the tick species, tick life stage and host response to the bite. The bottom line: you want to get rid of a tick as quickly as possible.

**8- Myth: If you find a tick, the best way to remove it is to burn it with a match-**

**Fact** - According to Dr. Stephen Rich, this thinking is totally wrong and misguided. "Imagine trying to burn something the size of a poppy seed or smaller that's attached closely to your skin," he says. "This is potentially dangerous and painful. Agitating the tick can put you at a higher risk of exposure."

Other popular myths about removing ticks include smothering it with oil, butter, nail polish, nail polish remover, dish detergent, Vaseline, alcohol or aftershave. All pose the same risk as burning.

The best - and safest - way to remove a tick is to use [fine-tipped tweezers](#). Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible, and pull straight up in a firm but slow and steady motion until it pops out of the skin.

**9. Myth: The head of a tick can burrow under your skin and cause disease even after you remove the body.**

**Fact** - Ticks don't have heads. Ticks have barbed mouth parts which can remain in the skin if the entire tick is not removed. That can cause skin inflammation or a local infection.

Only tiny cutting limbs and a barbed feeding tube (too small to see easily with the naked eye) enter the skin. However, the tick creates a pit in the flesh of its host, in which its body sits. This can make it appear as if the tick has gone deep inside the skin.

**10. Myth: You should dispose of an embedded tick by flushing it down the toilet. You don't need to waste money getting it tested if you have removed it properly.**

**Fact:** There are several reasons to save the tick and have it tested, and many states have free testing services.

- "Test it for the public good. It is helpful to know what type of tick bit you, and what type of pathogens or parasites it is carrying", says Dr. Rich. "The tick you find might be new to the area, or it might be carrying a disease that has not been found in the area before".
- Test for your peace of mind. Not all ticks carry diseases. If the tick is carrying pathogens,, the onset of symptoms may be similar, but the necessary treatment may be different.

**11. Myth: If a tick gives you Lyme Disease, you'll get a bullseye rash.**

**Fact:** Less than 50% of Lyme disease patients ever find a bull's-eye rash, or any rash at all. But that doesn't mean you don't have Lyme.

Rashes present in many different ways. Some are red and some are pink. Some are big and blotchy or spotted. If you find any rash at all, and you start to experience symptoms of tick-borne illness such as flu-like illness, do not assume your rash is nothing. This is why it's best to save the tick and have it tested so you know what you may be dealing with.

**12. Myth: If your blood test is negative, you're in the clear).**

**Fact:** Unfortunately, there is still no reliable test for tick-borne diseases. That is why it is so important to be vigilant about checking for ticks and removing them properly if you find one.

There are several reasons for inaccurate results. The sensitivity varies depending on how long an individual has been infected. Also, if you have received antibiotics in the early stage of the

disease, antibody levels may be too low to be detected. Antibodies to *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the Lyme bacteria, often do not appear in the blood for several weeks.

You will find detailed information, illustrations and videos about how to check yourself, your family and your pets for ticks, and how to remove them correctly [TickEase.com](http://TickEase.com)

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Tick Man Dan says:  
"Make tick checks part  
of your daily routine,  
and...

*Don't Neglect Your  
Crevices!!!*

Visit [www.tickease.com](http://www.tickease.com) for tick safety info!

