

TICK STATEMENT AND INFORMATION

FROM OSHA

Tips: Tick Bite Protection

Ticks carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans and animals. In the United States, there are 82 species of ticks that collectively can cause nine major diseases, according to the American College of Emergency Physicians. The most common diseases caused by ticks are Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme disease. Most tick-related diseases have symptoms similar to the flu, such as high fever, headache, muscle aches, vomiting and loss of appetite.

Deer ticks can transmit Lyme disease. Most cases of Lyme disease occur in the Northeast from Maryland to Maine; in the North-central states, mostly in Wisconsin and Minnesota; and on the West Coast, particularly northern California. The risk of being bitten by an infected tick is greatest in the summer months.

According to OSHA, the incidence and prevalence of Lyme disease from occupational exposure has not been precisely defined. Several studies, however, have identified outdoor occupational exposure as a risk factor. The true incidence of occupationally acquired Lyme disease is hard to define because pinpointing the exact circumstances of infection is exceedingly difficult. In fact, the majority of infected people do not recall being bitten by a tick.

Occupations that require outdoor activity/work in areas where the disease is endemic can place an individual at increased risk of exposure to an infected tick and therefore to Lyme disease. Occupations that may be associated with an increased risk of exposure to infected ticks include construction, landscaping, forestry, brush clearing, land surveying, farming, railroad work, oil field work, utility line work and park/wildlife management.

The Department of Veterans Affairs offers the following tips to protect yourself from tick bites as you step outdoors this summer.

- Wear light colors so it is easier to see ticks.
- Use university tested insect repellent and follow the label directions.
- Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, shoes and socks.
- Tuck pant bottoms into sock tops to keep ticks from getting under clothing.
- Conduct a head-to-toe examination of yourself and your children after being outdoors.

VA also advises that if you are bitten by a tick, remove it using fine tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the surface of the skin as possible. Pull firmly but gently and do not jerk or twist. Be careful not to puncture the body of the tick since its fluids may contain infectious agents. Apply alcohol to the wound. Notify your health care provider and preserve the tick in alcohol for identification.

An OSHA memorandum states that if an individual engaged in outdoor work in heavily wooded or brushy areas develops flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, muscle aches, joint pains, neck stiffness, headache) or a bulls-eye rash, the worker should seek medical attention even the employee cannot recall receiving a tick bite. Medical evaluation following a tick bite in a high-endemic area for Lyme disease or other tickborne illness may help to alleviate concerns and establish a baseline for follow-up of the bitten individual should signs and symptoms develop.

More information about occupational exposure to Lyme disease can be found at <http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib021103.html>.

***The preceding information in this article was taken from an OSHA report: August 2005.**

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