

# News Release

For immediate release: April 24, 2008

(08-061)

Contacts: Liz Dykstra, Zoonotic Disease Program  
Allison Cook, Communications Office

360-236-3388  
360-236-4022

## **Pull up your socks: ticks are active with warm spring weather**

**OLYMPIA** — Warmer weather signals the beginning of tick season in Washington. Along with being a nuisance, ticks can spread diseases, such as Lyme disease or tick-borne relapsing fever. Protection and prevention depends on which tick environment you find yourself in.

“The diseases that ticks often carry can be quite serious, and the best strategy is to avoid them as much as possible,” said Liz Dykstra, PhD, public health entomologist at the state Department of Health. “Hard ticks are usually found in wooded or brushy areas and along edges of grassy meadows. You may come into contact with ticks when brushing up against vegetation in those areas.”

When you venture into hard tick habitat, the state health department offers these tips:

- Wear light, long-sleeved shirts and pants – this makes ticks easier to spot and prevents them from getting to your skin. Perform “buddy checks” by looking over family members’ or friends’ clothing and skin to see if any ticks have attached. Pay special attention in and around hair, ears, under arms, between legs, and back of knees.
- Use tick repellents which contain DEET or permethrin – make sure to follow label instructions carefully. Tick control products are also available for pets – make sure to follow label instructions and check with your veterinarian if you have questions.

Soft ticks, another type of tick, spend most of their time in rodent nests. They feed for brief periods of time at night. People are often exposed to soft ticks when they spend the night in cabins infested with rodents. Precautions against soft ticks include:

- Check sleeping areas for evidence of rodents – holes in floors, walls or ceilings; shredded material from mattresses or furniture; and rodent droppings. Avoid sleeping on the floor or in a bed that touches a wall. If the cabin was unoccupied before you arrived, be sure to change and wash all bedding.
- Prevent rodents from entering the building, eliminate their food sources, and perform rodent control. Also consider tick control products; follow insecticide label instructions or hire a pest management professional.

If you find an attached tick, it should be removed promptly and carefully by grasping it close to the skin with tweezers and pulling it slowly and directly out of its attachment site. Avoid crushing the tick’s body.

“After you remove a tick, remember where and when the bite occurred, and try to preserve the tick in isopropyl alcohol,” said Dykstra. “If a fever, rash, or other unusual illness occurs within a month of the bite, see a doctor and explain you had a tick exposure. This information, along with the identification of the tick, will help the doctor diagnose the illness.”

More information is available on the Department of Health’s [Tick-borne Disease Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WATickDiseases.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WATickDiseases.htm>) or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s [Stop Ticks](http://www.cdc.gov/Features/StopTicks) page (<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/StopTicks>).

Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for a healthy dose of information.