

SDSU

Extension



## An identification guide to common Ticks of South Dakota

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## Preventing Tick Bites

The best approach to dealing with ticks during the summer is to prevent them from biting! If you are spending any time outdoors, it is important to regularly check yourself for ticks. Be especially careful in places where ticks are abundant such as in tall grass, wooded areas, and near lakes and water ways.

To help ward off ticks, you should wear clothing that covers as much skin surface area as possible (i.e., long sleeves, long pants, shoes and socks). Tucking pants into long socks (preferably white) can make crawling ticks more visible so that they can be removed. Permethrin spray applied to clothes and shoes can also be helpful by repelling ticks through multiple outings. Make sure to read and follow all label directions when treating clothing or applying personal repellent.

Areas to evaluate during tick checks are:

- |             |                |               |
|-------------|----------------|---------------|
| • Scalp     | • Belly button | • Legs        |
| • Ears      | • Waist        | • Pelvic area |
| • Underarms | • Back         |               |

If an unembedded tick is observed, it should be immediately removed and disposed of. If the tick is embedded, it should be removed using a pair of pointy tweezers (i.e., not common household tweezers). It is very important to remove ticks by the mouthparts to avoid squeezing their bodies. Squeezing can expel the contents of the tick into the wound, which greatly increases the chances of contracting tick-borne diseases.

### Steps to Safely Remove a Tick

**Step 1:** Grasp the tick with the pointy tweezers as close to the skin as possible.

**Step 2:** Pull the tick straight out with slow, steady force.

**Step 3:** Once the tick is removed, disinfect the bite area with rubbing alcohol or soap and water.

**Step 4:** Dispose of the tick by flushing it down the toilet. If you would like to have the tick identified, bring it to your healthcare provider in rubbing alcohol or in a sealed container.

## **American Dog Tick** **(*Dermacentor variabilis*)**

**Transmits:** Tularemia and Rocky Mountain spotted fever

**Range in SD:** found statewide



**Male**



**Female**

- Adult females are most likely to bite humans
- Adult males will feed on humans but won't engorge
- Greatest activity during spring and summer (May-August)
- Most common in areas with little to no tree cover
- Can survive up to 2 years without a host

## **Blacklegged Tick/Deer Tick** **(*Ixodes scapularis*)**

**Transmits:** Lyme disease, Babesiosis, human granulocytic anaplasmosis (HGA), and deer tick virus

**Range in SD:** eastern third of the state



**Female**

- **#1 for transmitting Lyme disease**
- Distribution is heavily dependent on populations of white-tailed deer (reproductive host)
- Both nymphs and adults transmit diseases
- Males do not feed
- Active from October-May as long as daytime temperatures remain above freezing
- Adults are commonly found on knee-high plant material
- Two years to complete life cycle

## Lonestar Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*)

**Transmits:** Human ehrlichiosis, Tularemia, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Southern tick associated rash illness, Heartland virus, and Bourbon virus

**Range in SD:** southeast corner, isolated observations



**Female**

- Most commonly found in wooded areas with dense undergrowth and around animal resting areas
- Present on tips of grasses and low-lying branches
- Nymphs and adults can transmit diseases
- Aggressive human biters
- Adults are active from April to late August
- Implicated in transmitting alpha-gal sugar, which can cause an allergic reaction after consuming red meat

## Rocky Mountain Wood Tick (*Dermacentor andersoni*)

**Transmits:** Colorado tick fever virus, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and Tularemia

**Range in SD:** western edge, common in Rocky Mountain states



**Male**

**Female**

- Found in wooded areas, shrublands, and open grasslands
- Saliva contains a neurotoxin that can cause paralysis in humans and pets
- Most active from late spring to early summer

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