

'Tis the (Tick) Season

People everywhere are conquering their cabin fever and are enjoying the great outdoors after a long, bitter winter. But before you head out for that hike, health care experts remind you to take precautions to avoid tick bites.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates around 300,000 people are infected with Lyme disease each year, and is now warning people to be on the lookout for signs and symptoms of the disease, which is usually contracted through tick bites.

Tina Barton, Infection Preventionist at OSF HealthCare Saint James-John W. Albrecht Medical Center says there are tell-tale signs of Lyme disease, including a rash around the bite mark that takes the shape of a bulls-eye.

"If you get infected, then it starts out with a rash. The rash may not appear for like three days or so and then it's followed by a lot of like flu-like symptoms," said Barton. "So it can be fatigue and sore throats and things like that can go along with it too."

When caught early, Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics. However, when untreated the disease can develop into meningitis, or other severe illnesses that can require hospitalization and further treatment.

According to Barton, the best action against Lyme disease is to pay attention to your surroundings and avoid the bite in the first place.

"If you're going to be in a wooded area or a weedy area, that type of thing, you need to stay in the middle of the path and not out where you're up against it," she said. "Because there's a myth out there that ticks fall out of trees, but they don't fall out of trees, they're on the ground so they get on you and they crawl up you."

[The CDC gives us some simple steps](#) to keep tick bites at bay:

Avoid Direct Contact with Ticks

- Avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter.
- Walk in the center of trails.

Repel Ticks on Skin and Clothing

- Use repellent that contains 20 percent or more DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 on exposed skin for protection that lasts several hours.
- Use products that contain permethrin on clothing. Treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants, socks and tents with products containing 0.5% permethrin. It remains protective through several washings. Pre-treated clothing is available and may be protective longer.
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has an [online tool to help you select the repellent](#) that is best for you and your family.

Find and Remove Ticks from Your Body

- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within 2 hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you.
- Conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body upon return from tick-infested areas. Parents should check their children for ticks under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist, and especially in their hair.
- Examine gear and pets. Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, then attach to a person later, so carefully examine pets, coats, and day packs.
- Tumble dry clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors.