

It's tick season - how do I protect myself and my family?

Ticks are active all year, but in the spring people are out as well, so there's increased risk for Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases (like anaplasmosis and ehrlichiosis). Lyme disease is the most common tick-borne infection in the US; there were more than 8,000 cases in Massachusetts alone last year.

There are three main things you can do to help "avoid the bite":

- Practice good personal protection when you head outdoors.
- Do daily tick checks.
- Modify the area around your house to minimize ticks.

Protecting yourself while outdoors

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health and US CDC recommend the following: (<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/lyme-disease>)

- Use a repellent with DEET (the chemical N-N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) on your skin and clothes, or permethrin (just for clothes/shoes); it's important to use them according to the instructions, especially with small children. Other repellents also work including picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR 3535 (more info: www.mass.gov/dph/tick).
- Wear long sleeves and light-colored pants tucked into your socks or boots.
- Stay on cleared trails when walking or hiking, and avoid brushing against vegetation.
- If you have pets, especially if they spent time outdoors, be sure talk with your veterinarian about tick control options (tick collars, repellents).

Add tick-checks to your daily routine

The best thing is to avoid tick bites whenever possible, and a tick-check helps find them before they can attach, lessening your risk for Lyme disease and other infections.

- Favorite places ticks like to go on your body include areas between the toes, back of the knees, groin, armpits, and neck, along the hairline, and behind the ears. Remember to check your children and pets, too. Remove any attached ticks as soon as possible. Print off a poster from MA DPH & put it on the fridge to remind yourself: <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/07/oi/tick-poster-check.pdf>
- If you find ticks on you or your family (especially if they are attached), you can have them tested at UMass Tick Report (<https://ag.umass.edu/services/tick-borne-disease-diagnostics>) for many different infections (\$50 for basic testing). These tests aren't perfect, so be sure to follow up with your health provider if you are having symptoms.

Modifying your yard to lower your risk

Finally, there are many steps you can take to minimize tick habitat surrounding your house. Ticks need shady, humid areas to thrive, so even small changes can lower your risk!



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| 1 | Tick zone | Avoid areas with forest and brush where deer, rodents, and ticks are common. |
| 2 | Wood chip barrier | Use a 3 ft. barrier of wood chips or rock to separate the "tick zone" and rock walls from the lawn. |
| 3 | Wood pile | Keep wood piles on the wood chip barrier, away from the home. |
| 4 | Tick migration zone | Maintain a 9 ft. barrier of lawn between the wood chips and areas such as patios, gardens, and play sets. |
| 5 | Tick safe zone | Enjoy daily living activities such as gardening and outdoor play inside this perimeter. |
| 6 | Gardens | Plant deer resistant crops. If desired, an 8-ft. fence can keep deer out of the yard. |
| 7 | Play sets | Keep play sets in the "tick safe zone" in sunny areas where ticks have difficulty surviving. |

Based on a diagram by K. Stafford, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station

Landscape modifications to minimize tick areas.

This diagram is available with additional information at https://www.cdc.gov/lyme/prev/in_the_yard.html

The Board of Health is grateful to Shutesbury resident Andrew Lover of the UMass School of Public Health and Health Sciences for this excellent article