

Ticks in Kansas

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Controlling ticks is important not only because they are nuisance parasites of humans and animals, but also because they are vectors of a variety of bacterial and protozoal microbial pathogens. Ticks most commonly find a host using an ambush technique. Ticks crawl onto blades of grass, weeds, or low bushes and wait for a host to brush against the vegetation. When the host brushes against the plant, the tick immediately releases from the vegetation and crawls onto the host. It then crawls around on the host seeking a site to attach and feed. Ticks do not jump or drop from trees. They are usually found just a few inches or feet off the ground on vegetation. The tick species most commonly encountered infesting people and dogs in Kansas are lone star tick, American dog tick, and blacklegged tick or deer tick. The brown dog tick usually only infests dogs.

American dog ticks are common throughout Kansas. American dog ticks are of importance because they can transmit Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever to dogs, cats and humans. The American dog tick can also cause tick paralysis.

The Lone star tick is named for the easily recognizable single white spot on the dorsal shield of the female. Males do not have the white spot, but have a few short white to yellow lines on the edge of their dorsal shield. It occurs most commonly in woodland habitats with dense underbrush. While the lone star tick is considered a major nuisance parasite, it can be the cause of a Lyme disease-like infection called Southern tick-associated rash illness.

The brown dog tick is reddish brown in color, lacking the dorsal markings seen on the American dog tick and lone star tick. Infestations of homes or kennels are distressing to pet owners and are extremely difficult to eradicate.

The black-legged tick is also referred to as the deer tick. Importance of this tick is increasing across eastern Kansas. They feed primarily on white-footed mice but also on a variety of other small mammals. This tick is the vector of Lyme disease.

Personal protection - It is a good idea to avoid going into tall grass, weeds, and brushy areas and to restrict pets from such areas. Light-colored clothing helps to see ticks before they can reach the skin. Repellents based on DEET and permethrin work well keeping ticks (and mosquitoes) away. Permethrin-based repellents must not be applied directly to skin. After coming home from potentially tick-infested areas, inspect skin and remove ticks immediately. Ticks removed within several hours after attachment are very unlikely to transmit pathogens. If you develop a rash and/or fever within 14 days after tick removal, see your family doctor immediately.

Prevention and control - Grassy and weedy areas around the house should be clipped short to expose ticks to the sunlight and consequent desiccation. Spring burning of grasslands directly reduces tick populations and rodent (tick host) habitat temporarily. Chemical pesticides targeting ticks (and mites) are called acaricides. These should be used only in areas with chronic tick problems.

For additional and detailed information on ticks in Kansas, control and prevention, go to the Extension bookstore at <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/>. Type ticks into the search box to download the publications.