

TIP OF THE WEEK

June 22, 2009

Summer Can Bring Ticks

Outdoor summer activity in Iowa means exposure to ticks. Ken Holscher, ISU entomologist says, “Ticks don’t find people – people find ticks.” The tick will usually stay in one location in tall grasses or wooded areas and wait until a ‘meal’ comes to them. Ticks nearly always live at ground level. Holscher said, “When they sense a meal moving into their territory, through indicators such as ground vibrations or the carbon dioxide emitted by the animal, they move into position on grass blades and other plants where they can easily latch on to the animal as it brushes by.”

Ticks are frequently found in the hair and on the head, and Holscher says that is because they have worked their way up the body looking for a comfortable place to attach for a feeding.

If you are bitten by a tick, the best way to detach it is to pull it out with slow steady pressure using tweezers or forceps. Other tick removal methods can actually cause more harm than good. People who spend time in tick habitats for recreation or work reasons can protect themselves by dressing appropriately, including long pants tucked inside boots or socks. Masking tape wrapped around the bottom of your pants leg with the sticky side out also will help keep ticks from migrating up your body to open skin.

Ticks cannot survive in dry sunny areas. So, keeping lawns mowed and vegetation trimmed can help control them. Insecticides are usually not effective in eliminating large numbers of ticks for extended periods of time. Limited insecticide sprays of Dursban, diazinon, or Sevin to the edges of lawns, however, can be somewhat effective in minimizing tick movement into these areas.