

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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What is Crawling on Me?

Just as we get more active in the springtime, so do ticks. Since we have received a few calls about ticks, I thought this might be a good topic this week. Spending more time outdoors will likely bring us into habitats where ticks are found. Therefore, the following information will be helpful if you, a family member or a pet have picked up one of these unwelcome hitchhikers. The American dog tick (wood tick), the most common tick in the state of Iowa, will be the focus of this column. Other ticks that you could encounter include the blacklegged or deer tick and the lone star tick. Ticks are typically active from late March through August.

Now if you are looking for some facts that you can really impress your family and friends with, try these: there are four life stages ticks go through: egg, larva, nymph and adult; tick larva have six legs; the nymph and adult have eight legs; ticks you see engorged after feeding are the females that will eventually drop off their host and lay a thousand eggs or more on the ground and then die.

Adult ticks commonly infest large and medium sized mammals such as dogs, cattle, deer, raccoons, and opossums while the immature stages (larvae and nymphs) feed on smaller mammals such as meadow mice, squirrels and chipmunks. All stages will feed on us if given the opportunity. The larva, nymph and adult must have a blood meal from a separate host before they can move to the next life stage. Although they are abundant, the American dog tick is not considered to be a serious human health threat in Iowa (they do not transmit Lyme disease).

Ticks are typically found in grassy, brushy, wooded and shaded areas. This is because ticks survive in environments where the humidity is high. If they are put in environments that have lower humidity they do not survive well. Therefore, the most effective and permanent control of ticks comes from habitat management. Quite simply, that means reducing the humidity in their preferred habitat by keeping grass well clipped, removing brush and pruning trees to allow more sunlight to penetrate to the soil surface.

The best approach when working or playing in tick-infested areas is to use personal protection in the form of repellants and protective clothing. Carefully inspect for and promptly remove attached ticks. To remove an attached tick, use a tweezers to grab the head of the tick where the mouth parts have been inserted into the skin, then pull straight up and out using slow steady pressure without twisting. Then clean the bite area and disinfect. Ticks usually don't feed for the first twenty-four hours so it is important to check yourself, children, others (especially around the head and neck areas) and pets promptly upon leaving an infested area.

If you would like more information about ticks, call the Grundy Office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979 and ask for publication PM2036.