

OUT & ABOUT



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# KNOW YOUR TICKS

With tick season here and bites soaring in recent years, you need to know what you're up against

Michael Sol Warren For The Star-Ledger

Let's talk about ticks. The tiny, blood-sucking creatures of nightmares are back in the news after it was recently confirmed that an invasive species of Asian tick that swarms livestock in the thousands survived the winter and is now established in New Jersey.

But the new arrivals are hardly the only kind of tick you might encounter in the Garden State. Tick season is upon us, and tick bites have been skyrocketing in recent years.

Get to know the ticks of New Jersey, and how they could affect you.

**BLACKLEGGED TICK**

These are the ticks your mother warned you about. Blacklegged ticks, also called deer ticks, are found anywhere white-tailed deer roam, according to the University of Rhode Island. Females have a large dark brown spot on a lighter brown-orange abdomen, while the males are almost entirely dark brown.

The deer tick's scientific name is *Ixodes scapularis*.

**What's the threat?:** Keep a close eye out for these ticks if you're out in the woods. Deer ticks are common in New Jersey, are known to bite humans, and can carry various diseases including Lyme disease, anaplasmosis and babesiosis. The ticks can also carry powassan virus, though that is pretty uncommon, according to Alvaro Toledo, an assistant professor of entomology at Rutgers University.

**LONE STAR TICK**

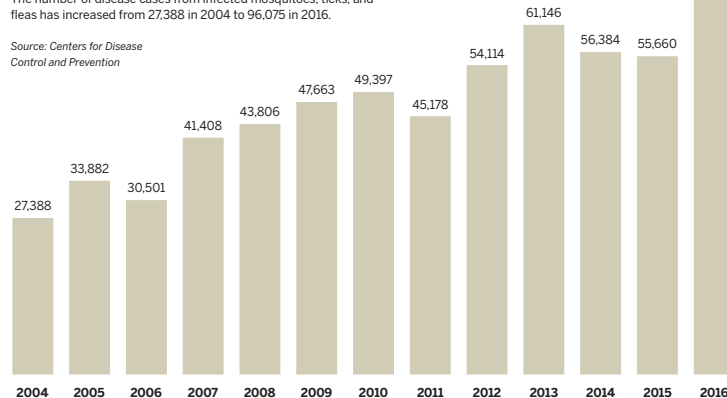
Most ticks are passive hunters, lying in wait for potential hosts to pass them by. Lone star ticks are unique, Toledo said, because they actively seek out hosts "more aggressively than other tick species." The ticks are known to actively pursue hosts as well as taking the passive method. Lone star ticks are smaller than deer ticks and identifiable by a solitary

SEE TICKS, B2

**Disease cases in the US**

The number of disease cases from infected mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas has increased from 27,388 in 2004 to 96,075 in 2016.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



## TICKS

FROM B1

white spot on the back of females.

The lone star tick's scientific name is *Amblyomma americanum*.

**What's the threat?:** Lone star ticks frequently bite people and are known to carry ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and southern tick-associated rash illness, or STARI, according to the University of Rhode Island. They're common in New Jersey, so be sure to keep a close eye out for them when you come home from that next trek in the woods.

### AMERICAN DOG TICK

Far less appealing than actual dogs, the third of New Jersey's most common ticks (along with deer ticks and lone star ticks), American dog ticks, also known as wood ticks, are not your friends. Female American dog ticks are identifiable by the large off-white marking on their dark brown body, while the males appear more off-white with dark brown spots.

The American dog tick's scientific name is *Dermacentor variabilis*.

**What's the threat?:** American dog ticks are known to bite people and can carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia, according to the University of Rhode Island.

### LONGHORN TICK

The Garden State newcomer that you've read so much about is a far greater threat to animals and livestock than humans. Though the longhorn tick is known to spread disease to humans in other nations, it has yet to have an impact on human health in New Jersey.

The longhorn tick's scientific name is *Haemaphysalis longicornis*.

**What's the threat?:** Longhorn ticks pose a much larger threat to the livestock and wildlife they swarm by the thousands than people. The ticks have been known to occasionally bite people in Asia, but no people have reported bites yet in New Jersey. And while the ticks are associated with a few diseases in the Eastern hemisphere, it is unclear if they are capable of spreading diseases that are found in New Jersey.

### BROWN DOG TICK

Make sure Fido is on high alert: These ticks want your dog, and any infestations can be very difficult to remove because brown dog ticks can live both in your house and in your yard.

The brown dog tick's scientific name is *Rhipicephalus sanguineus*.

**What's the threat?:** These arachnids couldn't care less about you: Brown dog ticks only want to feast on you dog's blood. Still, you should keep an eye out for these ticks. "If they don't find a dog, they can bite a human," Toledo said. Brown dog ticks can carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever as well as canine ehrlichiosis and canine babesiosis, according to the University of Rhode Island.

### WOODCHUCK TICK

Woodchuck ticks can be found anywhere east of the Rocky Mountains, but according to the University of Maine they're most common in New England, the Midwest and southern Canada. The ticks are about the size of a sesame seed and are very similar in appearance to deer ticks.

The woodchuck tick's scientific name is *Ixodes cookei*.

**What's the threat?:** Woodchuck ticks are known to carry powassan virus, but don't worry: Toledo says these ticks are rarely encountered by humans. Instead they prefer to feed on, you guessed it, woodchucks and other small mammals.

### RABBIT TICK

What the brown dog tick is to dogs, the rabbit tick is to rabbits.

The rabbit tick's scientific name is *Haemaphysalis leporispalustris*.

**What's the threat?:** Rabbit ticks are found across the Americas but are rarely encountered by humans. As the name suggests, these ticks are focused on rabbits, according to Toledo. Sorry, Bugs.

### MOOSE TICK

These ticks are found across North America, but as the name suggests they are strongly associated with the presence of moose, according to the University of Maine.

Also called the winter tick, the moose tick's scientific name is *Dermacentor albipictus*.

**What's the threat?:** Moose ticks are not considered a threat to human health, but good luck if you're a moose. The giant creatures struggle with tick removal and can become host to thousands of ticks at a time.

Michael Sol Warren, NJ Advance Media, [mwarren@njadvancemedia.com](mailto:mwarren@njadvancemedia.com)

## Reduce your chances for disease

### How to tick-proof your home



- Ticks thrive on humidity but will die quickly in drier environments.
- Remove leaf litter and clear tall grass and brush around your home and at the edge of your lawn.
- Place wood chips or gravel between your lawn and wooded areas to create a barrier for ticks.
- Place wood piles in the wood chip barrier and away from your home.
- Discourage deer by planting deer-resistant crops or erecting an 8-foot fence around your garden.
- Keep children's play areas in sunny areas where ticks would have a difficult time surviving.
- Pesticides may help control tick populations but they could also harm vegetation, pets and young children.

### Signs of Lyme disease

#### Early signs of Lyme disease

- A bull's-eye rash, usually appearing within 3 to 14 days of a bite from an infected tick. Be aware, however, that not everyone reports a rash.
- Chills and fever
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle and joint pain
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Many of the symptoms mimic the flu. Although infection is most likely in late spring and summer, it is possible to encounter nymphs and ticks any time during the year.
- Patients treated with antibiotics in the early stages of infection usually recover quickly and completely.

#### Late signs of Lyme disease

- Arthritis, often appearing as bouts of joint pain in one or more large joint.
- Nervous system symptoms, such as numbness, pain, nerve paralysis and meningitis (fever, stiff neck, severe headache).
- Problems with memory or concentration, fatigue, headache and sleep disturbances that sometimes persist after treatment.
- Rarely, irregularities of heart rhythm.

### How to remove a tick

- Using fine-tipped tweezers, grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible and pull directly away in a steady motion.

➤ Avoid crushing the tick's body.

- Do not be alarmed if the tick's mouthparts remain in the skin.



- Cleanse the area, as well as your hands, with rubbing alcohol or soap and water.

- Do not use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish or other products.

- Dispose of the live tick by submerging it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag, wrapping it tightly in tape or flushing it down the toilet.

### How to prevent tick bites

- Avoid wooded and shrubby areas with high grass and leaf cover. Nymphs, which are difficult to spot, are most active between May and August.
- When hiking, stick to the center of the trail and avoid contact up against grasses and shrubs.
- When possible, cover bare arms and legs. Tuck pant legs into socks. Wear light-colored clothing.
- Treat clothing and gear, including shoes, with permethrin, an insect repellent that lasts through several washings. Wear insect repellent, such as 20 percent to 30 percent DEET, on exposed skin.
- Check your body for ticks and bathe as soon as possible after coming indoors. Wash any clothing you wore while outdoors.
- Perform daily tick checks, since they can be found in neighborhood parks and on suburban lawns. Early removal can reduce the risk of infection.