

TICK INFORMATION SHEET

Ticks - What they are?... how to avoid them?... and what to do if you get bitten!

What are Ticks?

Ticks are small parasitic arachnids, about the size of a poppy seed, that live off the blood of birds, deer, livestock, domestic animals and humans. They attack when the 'host' brushes past and feed by biting through soft skin and sucking blood after numbing the area, so you often won't feel a thing. Once embedded, they will steadily engorge as they feed on your blood.



In the UK, they are second only to mosquitoes for carrying diseases to humans; most notably [Lyme disease](#), as well as other less common infections.

Where are Ticks found?

The presence of ticks in the countryside is a simple fact of life. They live in soil and are found most abundantly in long grass, rough vegetation, bracken and woodland. They are active throughout the year, but are particularly lively between May and October, especially at times of warm weather.

How can I avoid Ticks?

Ticks are best avoided by keeping to open paths and avoiding walks through long vegetation. However, this is not possible on Bivouac, given the nature of the event. Insect repellent may also help deter them, but best practice is to keep skin covered, wear long trousers, tuck trousers into socks and wear a long-sleeved top. Light-coloured clothing makes it easier to spot ticks and brush them off immediately.

We also recommend a down-to-skin examination soon after the Bivouac event to ensure no unwanted guests are harboured at home, paying particular attention to high-risk areas such as the armpits, groin, ankles and scalp.

What do I do if I am bitten?

It's a natural instinct to want to rip it out immediately, *but wait ...*

Ticks bury their head into flesh, so that only the abdomen is protruding (as pictured). It is important to remove the critter as soon as possible, but it is vital to take your time ... stack the odds against infection in your favour by removing the critter properly ... there is no rush or panic!



If on the event, tell a leader and the first aid team will do the deed. If after the event, there are several devices on the market to aid their removal (web search "Tick Card"; a worthy investment for all future outdoor Scouting activities?) In the absence of such a device, use pointed (not blunt eyebrow) tweezers to hold the tick by the head, as close to the skin as possible, and pull upwards, slowly and consistently, without twisting, squeezing or crushing the tick, until it lets go - there may be considerable resistance.

Twisting, squeezing or crushing may leave the head or mouthparts remaining in the skin, or force the stomach contents into the bite - either could cause infection later.

Once the tick has been removed, clean the bite area with antiseptic disinfectant immediately.

LYME DISEASE INFORMATION SHEET

Whilst irritating, most tick bites are essentially harmless and can be treated with an insect bite cream or an antihistamine to reduce irritation. With this in mind, this information sheet seeks to raise awareness of the issue, not cause alarm, as occasionally, infection can occur.

What is Lyme Disease?

In the UK, Lyme disease is the most common human-borne illness that can develop after been bitten by (a minority of) ticks which carry the [Borrelia burgdorferi](#) bacteria. It is suggested that an infected tick has to be attached for over 24 hours to transmit the bacteria. Furthermore, most ticks are not infected by the bacteria and the incidence of bites develop into Lyme Disease in humans is low.

Symptoms of Lyme Disease

If bitten, keep a watchful eye on the bite area for up to a couple of months afterwards. The



most famous symptom is a bull's eye / brownish-reddy-pinky 'Polo mint' rash (as pictured), gradually spreading from the bite site. It appears anything between a few days to several weeks after being bitten and is the only sure-fire symptom of Lyme disease.

Rashes occurring within a few hours of a bite are not Lyme disease and are likely to be simple allergic reactions or infections.

However, less than 50% of people with Lyme disease get this rash. Of greater concern is the development of flu-like illness, including swollen glands near the site, mild headaches, tiredness and aching muscles and joints. In more serious cases, may also cause partial paralysis of the face (facial palsy) and tingling or loss of sensation in the limbs. In severe cases, nerve inflammation causes movement clumsiness and viral-type meningitis with brain swelling (encephalitis) can develop.

If you suspect you have Lyme disease, or you have any other doubt or concern, then head straight to your GP or local health care provider, telling them you have been in an environment when you could have picked up a tick bite. If left untreated, it will go on spreading across a much larger area but, if acted upon promptly, it will respond rapidly to effective antibiotic treatment.

To date, The Scout Association has no official information available in "Ticks" or "Lyme disease". Therefore, this information sheet has been prepared using sources freely available in the public domain, including www.thebmc.co.uk/hill-skills-tick-alert and www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk/about-ticks/ (accessed April 2015). It is intended to raise awareness and provide information, **not replace professional medical advice.**

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