

Tick Bites

What Are Ticks?

Ticks are small, spider-like creatures which feed on the blood of birds and mammals, including humans. They vary in size, usually between 1mm to 1cm long and they have either six or eight legs.

They can be found anywhere there is wildlife, usually in woodland and moorland areas, and are particularly common between March and October. The most common tick in Scotland is the sheep or deer tick. They do not fly or jump but climb on to animals or humans as they brush past.

About Tick Bites

Tick bites aren't usually painful and sometimes only cause a red lump to develop where you were bitten. However, in some cases they may cause:

- swelling
- itchiness
- blistering
- bruising

What Diseases do Ticks Carry?

In Scotland, the most common disease ticks transmit is Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis). They also carry other diseases but these mainly affect animals. In other parts of the world, ticks can spread different diseases, some of which can cause serious illness in both humans and animals

Preventing Tick Bites

Do:

- keep to footpaths and avoid long grass when out walking
- wear appropriate clothing (a long-sleeved shirt and trousers tucked into your socks)
- wear light-coloured fabrics that may help you spot a tick on your clothes
- use insect repellent on exposed skin
- check your skin for ticks
- check your children's head and neck areas, including their scalp
- make sure ticks are not brought home on your clothes
- check that pets do not bring ticks into your home in their fur

Removing a Tick Bite

If you've been bitten by a tick, you should try to remove it as soon as possible to reduce the risk of getting a tick-borne infection, such as [Lyme disease](#) (a bacterial infection that causes a pink or red circular rash to develop around the area of the bite).

If you suspect that you have a tick bite, complete our self-help guide to assess your symptoms and find out what to do next.

How to Remove a Tick

1. Using fine-toothed tweezers, gently grip the tick as close to the skin as possible.
2. Pull steadily away from the skin without twisting or crushing the tick.
3. Wash your skin with water and soap afterwards.
4. Apply an antiseptic cream to the skin around the bite.

Don't use a lit cigarette end, a match head or substances such as alcohol or petroleum jelly to force the tick out.

Some vets and pet shops sell cheap tick removal devices. These may be useful if you often spend time in areas where there are ticks.

If the tick's mouthparts break off in the skin and cannot be removed, these may cause local irritation but should fall out naturally in time.

What Do I Do Next?

Keep an eye on anywhere you have been bitten by a tick. There is no need to consult your GP if you have been bitten and have no symptoms. However, if you develop a rash or experience flu-like symptoms after being bitten, then you should see your GP.

Complications of Tick Bites

A small proportion of ticks carry the bacteria that can cause Lyme disease. Being bitten doesn't mean you'll definitely be infected. However, it's important to be aware of the risk and speak to a GP if you start to feel unwell.

Non-Urgent Advice: Speak to Your Doctor if You Have:

- a pink or red rash
- a temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) or above
- other [flu-like symptoms](#), such as a [headache](#) or joint pain
- swollen lymph nodes

[Find out more about the signs, symptoms and treatment of Lyme Disease.](#)