

# UW Health: Experts warn of bad tick season and offer advice to be safe outdoors

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MADISON, Wis. – Wisconsinites are welcoming warm summer weather, but rising temperatures also usher in peak months for the tick population.

Today, UW Health is offering tips for tracking and treating tick bites as people spend more time outdoors.

Ticks pose a threat beyond annoying bite pain; they can carry serious disease. In Wisconsin, the disease most associated with them is Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which is spread through the bite of an infected blacklegged tick, commonly called deer ticks. In many places in Wisconsin, more than one in five ticks are infected with this bacterium.

Just because you are bitten by a deer tick doesn't mean you will get Lyme disease, according to Dr. Nasia Safdar, medical director of infection control at UW Health.

"Ticks must be attached for a certain number of hours to transmit disease," she said. "For transmission of Lyme disease, the tick would need to be attached for at least 36 to 48 hours, but if the tick is removed within 24 hours of attachment the risk for Lyme disease is very low."

Signs of Lyme disease can range from common symptoms like, in many cases, a bullseye rash, headaches and fatigue to more atypical presentations including inflammation of joints, heart rhythm abnormalities, or rarely neurological condition including meningitis.

Physicians in Wisconsin are familiar with the different manifestations of Lyme disease, according to Dr. Joseph McBride, an adult and pediatric infectious disease physician at UW Health.

“If Lyme disease is detected, thankfully the infection can be treated with common antibiotics,” he said. “There are precautions you can take such as avoiding wooded areas and tall grass.”

However, given the plethora of outdoor activities in Wisconsin, many will venture out, so UW Health is offering the following tips for heading into the woods, on the trail or the backyard:

- Wear insect repellent that contains 20 to 30% DEET
- Spray clothes with permethrin, a pesticide that kills flies, ticks and mosquitos
- Inspect yourself after being outside and make sure to check areas like armpits, behind knees, waistline, ears and hair
- Check your pets for ticks. You can't get sick from your pet, but ticks could change hosts and jump to you instead
- Take a shower as soon as possible after being outside
- To learn more about ticks and how to identify them, download The Tick [app](#), which was developed at UW–Madison.