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## **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY AND STATE OF CALIFORNIA PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES CAUTION RESIDENTS ABOUT TICKS AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES**

SANTA CRUZ – Spring is a time of high tick activity in our coastal hills and residents should be aware when spending time outdoors. Santa Cruz County Mosquito and Vector Control staff and the California Department of Public Health collaborate to collect and test ticks in the County. At least 2% of adult Western black-legged ticks (*Ixodes pacificus*) tested in recent years contain the bacteria that can cause Lyme disease, and the immature nymphs have been found to be 6-10% infected. In 2014, there were 5 reported cases of Lyme disease in Santa Cruz County, about the annual average (1.66 cases per 100,000 people).

The western black legged tick (*Ixodes pacificus*) and other human biting ticks found in Santa Cruz County such as the Pacific Coast tick (*Dermacentor occidentalis*) may carry other tick-borne diseases. Mosquito and Vector will continue to conduct surveys for these tick species and will submit them to State Public Health for testing. Because of tick-borne disease risk, residents are advised to take precautions to protect themselves from tick bites.

The tick starts out as an egg then matures into a larva, nymph and adult stage over several years. The nymph life stage is active in spring and summer, and is found on tree trunks, fallen logs, wooden benches and in leaf litter and feed on smaller animals, but they will also attach to people and pets. Adult ticks are most active in fall and winter when they climb to the tips of vegetation, often alongside trails or paths, and attach themselves to hosts, such as deer, pets or humans that brush against them.

Ticks feed by sticking their mouthparts into the skin of their host and sucking blood. Infections such as Lyme disease may be transmitted when the feeding tick is attached for at least a day. Adult ticks are smaller than apple seeds. **Nymphal ticks are about the size of a pinhead, and may be missed without careful examination.**

The risk of being bitten by ticks may be reduced with the following precautions:

- Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts.
- Use a repellent labeled for use against ticks; always follow label directions.
- Stay in the middle of a trail and avoid logs, tree trunks, trail margins, brush and grassy areas.
- Inspect yourself frequently while in tick habitat. Once out of tick habitat, thoroughly check your entire body. Parents should examine

their children, especially on the scalp and hairline. Check dogs and horses also.

- Shower off and launder clothes soon after activity in tick habitat.

To reduce the possibility of infection, remove attached ticks as soon as possible. Gently and firmly grasp the tick close to the head and pull it straight out, preferably with a tick tool or with fine-pointed tweezers. Save the tick for identification. Ticks should be kept alive by placing the tick into a sealable bag or container with a moist cotton ball in a refrigerator or cooler. The person removing the tick should wash their hands before and after removal and apply antiseptic to the bite area. Insecticides, Vaseline, lighted matches or gasoline should not be used to remove ticks because these techniques are ineffective or unsafe. Anyone who develops symptoms after being bitten by a tick should consult his or her physician.

Painful redness that occurs less than 24 hours after a tick bite and does not expand is likely a local allergic reaction to the tick bite. Early Lyme disease also has a rash but the Lyme disease rash appears three to 30 days after the tick bite, is often painless, and spreads to greater than 5 cm in diameter. The spreading rash can be accompanied by flu like symptoms, such as fever and body aches. Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics and most patients recover without complications, particularly when the disease is diagnosed early. If left untreated, Lyme disease can progress to arthritis and in some cases serious nervous system problems.



*Figure 1 Lyme Rash - erythema migrans*



*Figure 2 Nymph, male and female adult Western black-legged ticks (photos courtesy of CDPH)*

The Santa Cruz County Mosquito and Vector Control District can help with tick identification; we can be reached by calling 454-2590 or visiting [www.agdept.com](http://www.agdept.com). Another resource is the California Public Health Department website at <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/TickBorneDiseases.aspx> .

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[www.agdept.com/mvc.html](http://www.agdept.com/mvc.html)