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Tick populations have been high in western Nebraska. It is important to identify ticks if one is found embedded in the skin and to correctly remove ticks to reduce the risk of disease transfer.

Controlling tick-infested vegetation around the home and using contact residual insecticides in the spring on the fringe areas of the yard when ticks are most abundant reduces ticks.

Insect repellents for humans and shampoos or collars containing insecticide for pets can help control or reduce tick infestations.

Humans spending time in tick-infested areas should thoroughly examine their bodies after leaving the tick-infested areas with particular attention given to the head, neck, and waist.

Ticks usually require several hours of attachment and feeding before they transmit a disease. Tight-fitting clothing around the wrists, neck, waist, and ankles reduces the chance of ticks successfully attaching to a human.

Light-color clothing makes ticks easier to see and remove before they can attach. To remove attached ticks, use tweezers to grasp the tick at the point where the mouthparts enter the skin and gently pull until the tick is removed. Avoid breaking off the body of the tick from the mouthparts if possible.

Lyme disease signs and symptoms include a ring-shaped rash at the point of the bite, which usually appears within 3-32 days after the bite. A persistent headache, fever, spreading rash, aching joints, and fatigue are other symptoms. The disease organism is a spirochete bacterium

which can be treated successfully with antibiotics, particularly when the disease is recognized early.

The Nebraska Department of Public Health has published an excellent pamphlet that details the disease and contains color pictures and disease cycle diagrams. The pamphlet is available at Nebraska Extension offices.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is caused by a rickettsial organism. Symptoms include severe headaches, chills, fever, and general aches and pains.

A reddish-purple-black rash may occur on the bottom of the foot, ankles, palms of the hand, wrists or forearms a few days after infection. The rash may spread to the trunk, neck, and face.

If left untreated, the patient may be highly agitated, develop insomnia, become delirious or go into a coma. Antibiotics will control the disease and diagnosis can be confirmed with blood tests.

While the incidence of either of these diseases is very low in Nebraska, the seriousness of the diseases are enough to warrant taking the precautions outlined in this guide to avoid the possibility of infestation. Children and adults should avoid tick-infested areas in the spring and if unavoidable, careful body examinations should be made after leaving the areas in order to detect and remove attached ticks.