Keep summer pests from ticking you off

After several months of staying in because of the coronavirus and the return of warmer weather, many of us are getting outside to parks, trails and other nature activities. Unfortunately, ticks will be waiting for our return to the woods and nature trails.

Ticks are not insects but are arachnids (they have eight legs, insects have six). The life cycle of ticks include egg, larva, nymph, and adult. Ticks are also parasites — a blood meal is necessary to complete each developmental stage of their life cycle. When feeding on humans they may transmit microorganisms that can cause disease.

In general, larval and nymphs prefer to feed on smaller hosts, such as mice, and adults prefer larger animals. However, any may attach to humans.

Ticks do not fly or drop out of trees; they position themselves to hitch a ride when your legs or body comes in contact with vegetation. They will wait for a suitable host on tips of grass leaves, weeds and shrubs.

Ticks land on passing animals and people, climb until they find a good place to attach, and then feed with their piercing-sucking mouthparts. Female ticks can remain attached for seven to eleven days before dropping and laying as many as 6,000 eggs, depending on the species.

There are three tick species of importance found in Ohio: American dog tick (Dermacentor variabilis), lone star tick (Amblyomma americanum), black-legged tick, also known as the deer tick (Ixodes scapularis). All three may carry pathogens that can be transmitted to humans.

In our area, the American dog tick is the most common and the largest. It is brown in color and about 3/16 inch long before feeding. Dog ticks generally reside along the edge of the woods in brushy areas, unmowed grass, or vegetation along trails, roads or field edges.

American dog ticks are active during the spring and summer months, especially mid-April through July. They may transmit Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tularemia, human monocytic ehrlichiosis, and tick paralysis, all relatively rare diseases. Only the adult of the American dog tick will attach to humans.

Lone star ticks are slightly smaller than American dog, tend to be brown and have a silvery spot on the upper part of the scutum. Scutum is the shield-shaped area of the tick body behind the head.

Lone star ticks tend to be in southern Ohio, but may be brought into our area by migratory birds in isolated situations. They prefer shaded grassy and shrubby areas along roadsides or grassy fields. Larvae, nymphs, and adults will attach to humans.

The lone star tick may transmit monocytic ehrlichiosis, tularemia and Q-fever, and southern tick-associated rash illness (STARI).

Black-legged ticks are the smallest and are relatively new in our area. They are dark chocolate brown in color and about 1/16 inch long. The rear end of an adult female will be red to orange in color. They tend to be found in woods and are most active during the fall, winter and spring season.

The black-legged tick is primary found in eastern Ohio, however numbers have been increasing in the northwestern corner. The prevalence of woodlots rather than continuous woods have not been favorable for the spread of blacklegged tick into our area. Larvae, nymphs, and adults will attach to humans.

Black-legged ticks may transmit Lyme disease. This serious disease may debilitate a person if not detected early and treated with antibiotics. The disease is uncommon but doctors are seeing more of it as the blacklegged tick moves into Ohio. Black-legged ticks may also transmit a rare disease called human granulocytic anaplasmosis.

Prompt removal of an attached tick reduces the chance of a disease infection. Tick attachment of several hours or more is often required for disease transmission. When removing a tick, use tweezers to grasp an embedded tick as close to your skin as possible and near the tick’s mouthparts.

Use steady pressure to pull it out straight. Do not use a hot match or cigarette to remove a tick as this may cause the tick to burst. Solvents or other materials should also not be applied to the tick to “stimulate” detachment. Solvents are ineffective and delay removal.

When in tick areas, wear clothing that makes it easier to see crawling ticks and remove before attachment. This would include long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Tuck pant legs into socks and make sure shirt tails

Lentz is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources for the Ohio State University Extension Service in Hancock County.

Lentz is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources for the Ohio State University Extension Service in Hancock County.