

Ticks: *the summer health threat*

By Mary Beth Sallee

While safety measures are still underway due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there's another health threat lurking among us in the great outdoors: ticks.

After experiencing a mild winter, this year's tick season could be rougher than usual. These pests are already back and biting as summer begins.

"Ticks have been a problem for a long time," said Jonathan Larson, a University of Kentucky (UK) ento-mologist in the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment. "As for why we hear more about them now, there could be a few reasons. People are becoming more aware of them and the hazards of tick bites, such as Lyme Disease, and therefore are talking about them more. There could be more ticks overall. They are succeeding because of help from climate change or taking advantage of higher populations of mice and deer."

Contrary to belief, ticks do not necessarily "die off" during the winter season.

"They can overcome winter as immature ticks or as adults and survive cold weather events by hiding in leaf litter," Larson ex-plained. "Black legged ticks (deer ticks) in particular can be active in winter on any day above freezing."

Ticks are common in thick, grassy areas and tend to reside on the ends of blades of grass or the branches of trees and shrubs.

"Dog ticks prefer a less wooded area while black legged ticks and lone star ticks prefer wooded areas," Larson said. "On properties, we tend to find ticks along the edge where maintenance isn't necessarily performed."

According to Larson, ticks are responsible for transmitting pathogens that induce a variety of diseases, including Lyme disease, Ehrliciosis,

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This is an adult female longhorned tick climbing a blade of grass.

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