

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Check out these tips to protect yourself against ticks

Campbell Vaughn Augusta Chronicle

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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

The American dog tick is the primary carrier of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, which can be fatal.

Lone Star ticks can cause alpha-gal syndrome, a serious allergy to red meat.

Black-legged ticks, also known as deer ticks, are the main vectors for Lyme disease.

The first Saturday in September is on a lot of outdoorsmen's radars because it is always the opening weekend of dove season in Georgia. I have loved dove hunting since I was a kid when going with my grandfather.

Being outside with the weather we have had the last week has been amazing, but strolling around on the edge of the woods this time of year can be hazardous. I am always on the lookout for snakes, but the one that can really mess up the next few years of your life is hiding in the lurch.

I dislike ticks. They are gross and can spread disease.

In Georgia, we have three species that are commonly associated with humans. The main trifecta of unwelcomed arthropods in the Peach State is the black-legged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*), the Lone Star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*) and American dog tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*).

Black-legged ticks, or deer ticks, are the primary vectors for Lyme disease. Symptoms of this tick-spread disease include fever, headache, fatigue, and skin

rashes. Lyme disease is not associated with any deaths but when untreated the infection can spread to joints, the heart, and the nervous system. Lyme disease is a lot more common in the Northeast than in Georgia, but we still get about 1,000 cases each year.

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The most important tick-borne disease in the Southeast continues to be Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. This disease is primarily spread by the American dog tick.

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever has a fatality rate of 3-5% with most of the casualties being children under 15 years old. In the UGA Extension publication *Protect Yourself from Ticks*, Rocky Mountain Spotted fever is “characterized by a sudden onset of chills, fever, headache, and bloodshot eyes.

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The name spotted fever refers to the rash that appears two to four days after the onset of fever. The rash characteristically starts on the hands and feet as small, flat, pink spots that do not itch and gradually spreads. Doesn't sound like any fun to me at all.

My buddy Joe had a scare a couple of years ago thinking he might have contracted alpha-gal syndrome (AGS) from a Lone Star tick, and it almost caused a panic. AGS is where a type of sugar called alpha-gal is gathered into the tick from a mammal it was feeding on and then transmitted to a human. The problem is that humans don't recognize this type of alpha-gal sugar, and the immune system produces an antibody trying to fight it.

When humans consume alpha-gal sugar, an allergic reaction occurs. Symptoms include hives, itchy rash, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, severe stomach pain, swelling of the lips, difficulty breathing, drop in blood pressure and possibility of fatal anaphylaxis.

I sound like one of those fast-talking people at the end of a pharmaceutical advertisement. What had Joe so panicked is that alpha-gal sugars are found in red meat. Joe thought that he would never be able to have a steak, pot roast or a hamburger for the rest of his life.

So how do we avoid these bloodthirsty disease spreaders? An entomologist friend of mine gave me a list of things to do to protect yourself from ticks.

Wear long britches, tuck pant legs into your socks as well as tuck your shirt under your belt.

Use a repellent containing DEET. There are plenty of products available in all kinds of formulations. Some liquid formulations of DEET can be rubbed on the skin and will normally provide protection for several hours. There are aerosol versions of DEET that can be sprayed on clothing.

Another great repellent contains the insecticide permethrin that only comes as an aerosol to be applied directly to clothes and not the body. Permethrin is long-lasting and not only repels but will also kill ticks.

I have recently learned of some companies that will take your clothing and treat them with permethrin and mail them back to you. You can wash the clothes that have been treated as many as 70 times without losing efficacy. This would be great for foresters, surveyors and folks that spend a lot of time outdoors.

