



# A Guide to Ticks



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Alameda County Department of Environmental Health



Alameda County has a great diversity of tick species, but there are only three species of commonly encountered ticks that may pose a public health risk. Adult and immature ticks can be found in many of the popular wooded areas, trails, and recreational parks throughout the county, especially in those that experience moderate temperatures and high humidity.

If you are bitten by a tick, please contact us or submit an online request for service. Our District will identify the tick and, if necessary, provide information where to submit the tick for disease testing. If the tick was collected from a property in Alameda County, we can conduct an on-site inspection and evaluation.

## Appearance

Contrary to popular belief, ticks are not insects, but actually small, blood-sucking arachnids. They experience a complex life cycle with four different stages, growing from larval stages with six legs to nymph and adult stages with eight legs. They are divided into two groups: hard-bodied ticks and soft-bodied ticks. Both groups look quite different morphologically. The common ticks in Alameda County are all hard-bodied



ticks. Hard-bodied ticks, when not engorged with blood, are typically flattened with body colors that vary from light beige, reddish to dark brown. A fully engorged female tick can become five times larger than her normal size and turn greyish color when her abdomen fills with blood.



## Behavior

Ticks do not fly or jump. They are attracted to their host by detecting the animal's body odors, heat and moisture. They are also attracted to the vibrations created by the walking animals. Ticks will climb up grass stems and stretch their front legs out and wait to grasp an animal's fur or human clothing when they walk by. Walking in the middle of the trails and staying away from bushes can reduce the risks of picking up ticks.



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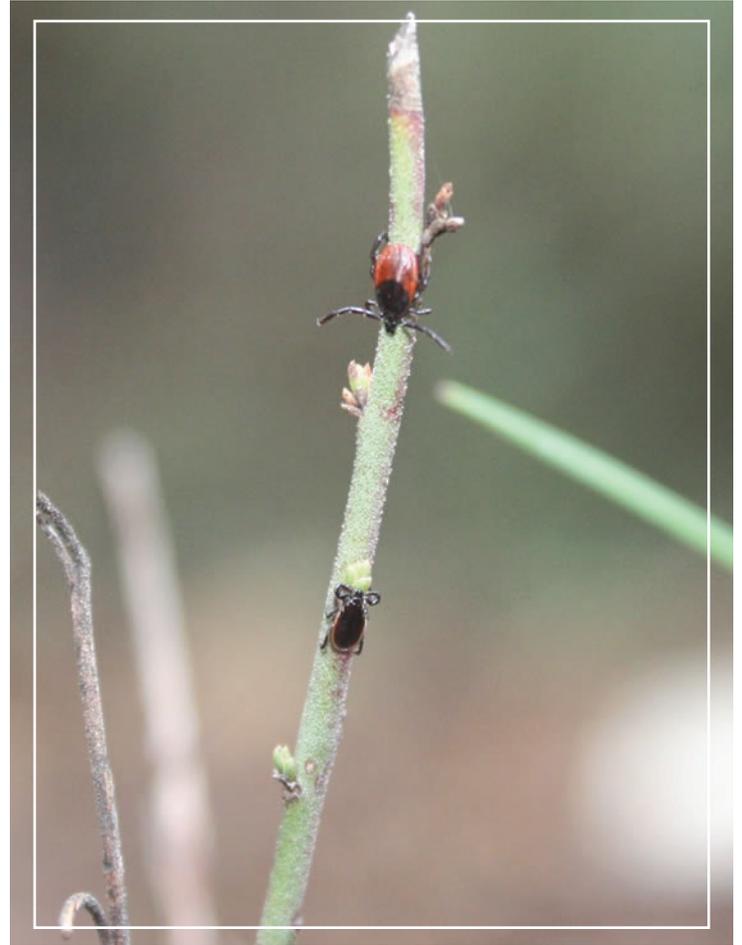
Unlike mosquitoes, ticks will crawl around the host's body and hunt for a suitable location to attach and start feeding. The length of time that ticks feed and attach onto the host will depend on the tick's life stage and species but can be from fifteen minutes to several days. Frequent tick checks on your body and your pets while out in the woods, and removing outer layers of clothing after returning home can help prevent tick bites.



### Public Health Concern

Tick have the ability to transmit many diseases (Anaplasmosis, Babesiosis, Ehrlichiosis, Relapsing fever, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Tularemia, and Lyme disease) to humans and animals. They are the most important public health concern arthropods.

Lyme disease is the most reported vector-borne disease in the U. S., with an estimated 300,000 people infected annually. In California, the Western black-legged tick is the only known vector of Lyme disease. Prevention (staying on the center of trails and avoiding contact with bushes, leaf litter and logs) and proper precautions (wearing clothing that covers the skin, and using repellents) may reduce the risk of contracting Lyme disease.



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