

PREVENTING DISEASE SPREAD BY TICKS

Ticks are bugs that feed on the blood of people, dogs, cats, deer, mice, birds and reptiles. Deer ticks and dog ticks are found throughout Massachusetts and may spread different disease causing germs when they bite you. Deer ticks may be responsible for causing Lyme disease, babesiosis and anaplasmosis. Dog ticks are not responsible for spreading Lyme disease but may be responsible for causing less common diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia.

Ticks attach to animals or people that come into direct contact with them. The disease can be spread when an infected tick bites a person and stays attached for a period of time. The longer the tick remains attached, the greater the chance it will be able to spread a disease causing germ.

People who spend time in grassy and wooded environments are at an increased risk of tick exposure. The chances of being bitten by a deer tick are greater during times of the year when ticks are most active. Young deer ticks, called nymphs, are active from mid-May to mid-August and are about the size of poppy seeds. Adult ticks, which are approximately the size of sesame seeds, are most active from March to mid-May and from mid-August to November. Both nymphs and adults can bite and transmit disease. The highest risk of being bitten by a dog tick occurs during spring and summer. Adult dog ticks are about the size of a watermelon seed.

Lyme disease is the most commonly reported tick-borne disease in Massachusetts. Lyme disease is caused by a bacteria transmitted by the bite of an infected deer tick. Lyme disease may cause an expanding rash at the site of the bite and/or flu like symptoms. If left untreated, the bacteria can spread to almost any site in the body and can cause joint pain, neurologic difficulties, and heart problems.

PIKE SCHOOL POLICY FOR THE PERSONAL PROTECTION OF STUDENTS

When students go outside to an area likely to have ticks, special precautions are taken to minimize the risk of tick bites. They are advised to:

- Wear light-colored clothing for easy tick discovery
- Wear long sleeved shirt and pants
- Tuck pants into socks and tuck shirt into pants
- Restrict play in wooded areas
- Stick to main pathways and the center of the trail when walking the Pike Nature Trail

Most importantly before the students come back inside they are asked to check themselves and each other for ticks on skin or clothing. The teachers and recess supervisors help the students with this process. Special attention is paid to favorite areas for ticks including inside and behind the ears, along the hairline, back of neck, armpits, legs, and behind the knees. The students brush off any ticks on clothing.

If a tick has attached itself to the skin, the student is sent to the nurse's office. The nurse will use a pair of fine point tweezers to grip the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull straight out with steady pressure. The school nurse will then contact the student's parent/guardian and recommend they follow up with their Primary Care Physician should further treatment be needed.

To reduce the presence of ticks in our playgrounds and school yards without using pesticides, The Pike School follows these recommendations from the Massachusetts Department of Health:

- Keep lawns mowed and edges trimmed.
- Clear brush, leaf litter and tall grass.
- In the fall, clear all leaf and garden litter, where ticks can live in the winter.
- Locate children's swing sets and other play equipment in sunny, dry areas, away from the woods where ticks can be abundant.