ER Visits For Tick Bites At Highest Level In A Decade: What To Know In MD

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Emergency room visits for tick bites are on the rise in the Northeast, including Maryland, according to new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For every 100,000 ER visits in the Northeast region in April, 163 were for tick-related complaints, according to the most current data. That's up from 52 visits in March. The Northeast reported the most tick bite visits, followed by the Midwest, Southwest, West and South Central regions, respectively.

Nationally, ER visits to treat tick bites are at their highest level in almost a decade, with 71 per 100,000 trips to the ER, compared to an average of about 30 per 100,000 at this time of year.

Ticks carry a plethora of diseases. According to the CDC, these blood-sucking insects are responsible for 90 percent of all vector-borne diseases.

They include Lyme disease, typical in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Midwest regions; Rocky Mountain spotted fever, a problem nationwide; anaplasmosis and ehrlichiosis, which are common in the eastern and southern U.S.; Powassan virus, common in the Northeast and Great Lakes region; and babesiosis, primarily found in the Northeast and upper Midwest.

Ticks are also responsible for Alpha-gal syndrome, which causes a sudden and unexpected allergic reaction to meat and dairy products. The vector is carried by the Lone Star tick, which is widely distributed throughout eastern states and is expanding in the Northeast, the Southeast and the Midwest.

Tick bite season typically peaks in May.

“We're running well above historic average and even well above last year,” Dr. John J. Halperin, chair of the New Jersey Stroke Care Advisory Panel and member of the department of neuroscience at Atlantic Health Overlook Medical Center in New Jersey, who partly focuses on Lyme disease, told ABC News.

“The ticks have started a little earlier. There seems to be a lot of them. A lot of people are going to the emergency room,” Halperin continued. “It’s not entirely clear how much of this is increased recognition, and as people become more aware of this, more are going to the emergency room. But there seems to be a clear increase in the number of ticks out there.”

To prevent tick bites, the CDC advises:

Know where ticks live. Ticks hang out in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas—and even your backyard.

Avoid high-risk areas. Skip tall grass, leaf litter, and dense brush when possible—and walk in the center of trails.

Use insect repellent. Apply EPA-registered repellents with ingredients like DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus.

Treat your clothes and gear. Use products with 0.5 percent permethrin on clothing, boots, and camping gear — or buy pre-treated items.

Dress to protect. Wear long sleeves and pants when possible to reduce exposed skin.

Check your clothes after being outside. Ticks can hitch a ride indoors—remove them and tumble dry clothes on high heat to kill any hidden ones.

Shower soon after coming inside. Showering within two hours can help wash off ticks and reduce disease risk.

Do a full-body tick check. Look carefully in hidden spots like:

- Under arms
- Behind ears
- In hair
- Behind knees
- Around the waist
- Between legs

Check pets and gear. Ticks can ride in on dogs, backpacks, and clothing—inspect everything after outdoor time.

Make your yard less tick-friendly. Reduce tick habitat by:

- Clearing leaf litter
- Mowing the lawn
- Creating barriers (wood chips or gravel)
- Keeping play areas away from wooded edges