



## DEALING WITH TICKS

Ticks are often encountered in W.A.'s bush and most bushwalkers continue to regard them as just a very minor distraction from the pleasures of bushwalking. Occasionally however, a bite may become infected and should be seen by a doctor.

There has been much commentary in recent times regarding risks of possible tick-borne diseases and allergies on the east coast of Australia. To date there appears to be no confirmed similar occurrence in W.A.

The following summarises some precautions and how to deal with ticks:

**Prevention-** To reduce the chance of picking up a tick during a walk it's a good idea to;

- i) Wear light-coloured clothing so ticks can be easily spotted and removed quickly;
- ii) Apply suitable insect repellent containing Picaridin or DEET (e.g. Repel, RID or Bushman Repellent) around shirt sleeve and trouser openings and around neckline etc before the walk starts. Tuck shirt in and tuck trousers into socks;
- iii) For safe, extra protection you could also pre-soak your hat and clothing in a dilute permethrin solution which may remain effective for up to 12 months or up to 30 washes. (Equip DeBugger bottle costs around \$25);
- iv) While on the walk avoid brushing up against foliage or long grass when possible;
- v) Be vigilant. Check yourself during the walk and at the end of the day in case any have attached during your walk;
- vi) After the walk place your pack and boots in the boot of your vehicle and spray with insect killer;
- vii) On arriving home put your walk clothes in the washing machine on a long, hot cycle to kill any ticks;
- viii) Finally, check in the shower that none are attached to your skin. Pay attention to head, behind ears, groin, armpits and back of knees.

**Recognition** - It is always wise to check yourself during the walk and at the end of the day to see if any ticks have attached during your walk. You will seldom feel any itching while a tick is attached so a good visual search is needed.

**Treatment** - Ticks are usually quite easy to remove but it is most important to avoid squeezing the body sac and releasing tick saliva and toxins into your bloodstream. The head itself does not bury into your skin; just the drill-like mouthpart (the hypostome). In the past many bushwalkers have simply levered ticks off with a finely pointed pair of tweezers as close to the skin as possible, using a gentle lifting motion. It is very unlikely that the mouthpart will break off and be left in your skin. (One of a variety of special tick removal devices that are now available could also be a useful addition to a first aid kit.)

A newer, recommended safer approach is to use a spray containing ether (e.g. Wart-Off Freeze Spray or Medi-Freeze Skin Tag Remover) to freeze the tick (avoiding freezing the surrounding skin), then wait about 10 minutes before brushing it off. The Wart-Off Freeze dispenser costs around \$30 but is good for 15 applications.

Another approach that works well with large ticks is to place a looped thread over the tick and pull it down until it is between the tick and the skin, then tighten the loop and lift the tick off.

Tiny larval ticks ('nymphs') can also be safely removed with permethrin cream (e.g. Lyclear Scabies Cream) which is simply rubbed on to kill the ticks.

DO NOT use methylated spirits or other chemicals to kill ticks as they may respond by releasing their body contents into your bloodstream.

After removing a nymph or adult tick a small quite itchy swelling, similar to a mosquito bite will likely occur and may take some days to disappear. If concerned that a bite has become infected check with your GP. Similar to other insect bites, very rarely people may suffer a severe allergic reaction and then need urgent medical assistance.