

# How to remove a tick

Tick [season](#) is fast approaching.

March 26, 2019, 3:18 PM EDT / Source: TODAY

By **Linda Carroll**

Remember when your mother told you to remove a tick by covering it with [nail polish](#)? Well, it's one of those rare occasions when mom was wrong. When it comes to ticks, experts say no to nail polish, oils and matches.

While it may seem early to be talking about tick removal, scientists have shown that many [survive winter](#) just fine under a cover of fallen leaves, popping out on warmer days to crawl onto any mammal passing by. Here's some advice in case a tick crawls onto you.

## How to remove a tick

The right way to remove a tick is with tweezers grasping the nasty little bloodsucker as close to your skin as possible, said Dr. Laura Goodman, an assistant research professor at the Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine in Ithaca, New York. "And you want to do it in one smooth motion," she advised. "You don't want to try to twist it around or add any substance. The key is to get it out as cleanly as possible."



[5-year-old girl was temporarily paralyzed by a tick bite, her mom warns](#)

JUNE 13, 2018 02:02

There are a couple of reasons for grabbing a tick close to your skin. First, Goodman noted, is that you will be able to get the tick's head and mouth. Use fine-tipped tweezers to help you get as close to the skin's surface as possible.

After you remove the tick, clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol or soap and water, [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests](#).

“If you want to have the tick identified, having the complete body including the head is important,” she explained. “There are multiple [different types](#) of ticks out there and they all look very much the same to the naked eye. Unless you get them under the microscope and are able to look at the mouth parts they are sometimes impossible to distinguish from one another.”

It's important to make sure you get the head out because it could cause a local skin infection if you leave it behind, Goodman warned.

Another important rule: You also need to be very careful not to squeeze the tick's body, Goodman said. That's because, if the tick is carrying a [disease](#), you would be pushing more of the pathogens into your body.

## How to dispose of a tick

Once you've removed the tick, you can dispose of it by putting it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag, wrapping it tightly in tape or flushing it down the toilet. If you want to bring it to a doctor, the sealed bag may be your best option.

Knowing what kind of tick you've been bitten by may give you clues to what kinds of diseases you could have been exposed to, such as [Lyme](#), [Rocky Mountain spotted fever](#) and [Powassan](#). “If you know which one it is, you'll know which pathogens that tick is capable of transmitting.”

That doesn't mean you should wait for tests on the tick to come back before seeing a doctor, Goodman said. “You may develop symptoms before the test results come back,” she explained, adding that symptoms need to be discussed with your doctor.

## Tick bite prevention

Goodman recommended that everyone who goes hiking carry a tick kit – which should include tweezers – with them. “Along with the removal device, you also want to bring alcohol wipes to clean up the spot where the tick was attached,” Goodman says.

Another item that should be in your tick kit is an empty prescription container, Goodman said. That way, you'll have a place to store the tick until you get back home where you can submerge it in alcohol or put it in the freezer (while still in the container) which will kill it. That way you'll still have your specimen to send to a lab to be identified.

The same removal rules apply to [pets](#), Goodman added.



Linda Carroll

Linda Carroll is a regular contributor to NBCNews.com and Today.com. She is also the co-author of *Out of the Clouds: The Unlikely Horseman* and *The Unwanted Colt who Conquered the Sport of Kings*.