Tick Bites

When to Be Concerned

If your child's been bitten by a tick, it's normal to feel anxious—but don't panic. Most tick bites are harmless and don't lead to illness. That said, it's important to know what to look for, how to care for the bite, and when to call a doctor.

What Is a Tick?

Ticks are tiny, spider-like insects that feed on blood. They often live in grassy, wooded areas and can latch onto people or animals who brush past. You might not feel the bite when it happens—but you may spot the tick later, still attached.

Are All Tick Bites Dangerous?

Not at all. Most tick bites don't cause any problems beyond mild skin irritation. But in some areas, certain ticks can spread infections like **Lyme disease** or **Rocky Mountain spotted fever**.

Knowing the signs to watch for can make a big difference.

How to Spot a Tick Bite

You might notice:

- A small red bump (similar to a mosquito bite)
- Itching or slight swelling
- Sometimes, the tick may still be attached to the skin

In rare cases, a rash or flu-like symptoms can appear a few days later—this is when you want to pay close attention.

When to Be Concerned

Call your doctor if:

- The tick was attached for more than 24–36 hours
- You're unsure how long the tick was attached
- The bite area develops a bull's-eye-shaped rash (a sign of possible Lyme disease)
- Your child develops fever, chills, fatigue, or joint pain within 30 days
- The tick was engorged (swollen with blood), which can increase risk of disease
- The tick was found in an area known for tick-borne illnesses.

Immediate Care: What to do if you find a Tick

Stay calm.
It's okay—removing it properly is what matters most.

Use fine-tipped tweezers.
Grab the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible.

Pull upward with steady pressure.
Don't twist or jerk. This helps avoid breaking the tick's mouthparts.

Clean the bite area with soap and water, rubbing alcohol, or iodine.

Save the tick (optional).
Place it in a sealed bag or container. You can label it with the date and location in case testing is needed later.

Wash your hands well.

Treatment & Follow-Up Options

For Most Tick Bites:

- Clean the area and apply an antibiotic ointment
- Watch for signs of infection (redness, swelling, pus)
- Use over-the-counter anti-itch creams if needed
- No antibiotics are usually needed unless signs of illness appear

If Lyme Disease Risk Is Present:

- A single dose of antibiotics may be recommended if the tick was attached for more than 36 hours and you're in a high-risk area
- Your provider will advise if testing or treatment is necessary based on symptoms and location

Keep a Symptom Log:

- Jot down any fevers, rashes, or other symptoms that appear in the days or weeks after the bite
- This helps your provider track patterns and decide on care quickly

Prevention Tips for the Whole Family

Wear long sleeves and pants when hiking or playing in wooded areas

Use insect repellent with DEET or permethrin (age-appropriate formulas)

Check your child's skin, scalp, behind ears, and clothing after outdoor play

Shower within 2 hours of being outdoors

Tumble dry clothes on high heat to kill ticks hiding in fabric