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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

SATURDAY, MAY 14, 1938.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "DOG TICKS AND SPOTTED FEVER." Information from Dr. F. C. Bishop, Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture.

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The first case of spotted fever ever recorded in New England occurred last summer. And during the past year the Department of Agriculture set up a field laboratory on the New England coast for the study of the insect that carries this dangerous disease -- the dog tick.

Up to about seven years ago nobody worried much about this familiar insect except perhaps the family dog. In the early summer Fido was likely to come home laden with ticks after a chase through tall grass or shrubbery along the damp coast or the bank of a stream. Many a dog owner has picked several hundred ticks off his dog at the end of a day in the woods -- and perhaps dozens off himself. Most people know that the bite of a tick can leave a red itching swollen sore that may last for weeks and that if ticks are not removed from a dog, they can make him very miserable and run down. Ticks have also been known to cause paralysis. And scientists long ago learned that ticks could carry disease. But up to 1931 no one had reason to have great fear of this common tick. In that year doctors reported the first case of dreaded spotted fever in the East and scientists found out for sure that the dog tick could carry the disease. Until then the only tick known to carry spotted fever was a variety in the Rocky Mountain region. When the common dog tick became a carrier, many other parts of the country were in danger.

Dog ticks live in most of the States east of the Rockies as well as in western and northern California and parts of Oregon. They flourish especially in damp regions -- along the east coast from Massachusetts to Florida, especially in the brush and grass growing near the beach. They also thrive in much of Texas and Florida, in southern Iowa and parts of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Curiously enough, in New England they are thick on the south side of Cape Cod and the islands to the south but not nearly so common on the north side. Few if any exist north of Plymouth or far inland. On Long Island they are especially abundant on the eastern half and in Maryland they prefer the Chesapeake Bay region and are seldom found west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. To prosper, they need dampness and plenty of small wild animals to make their first meal on.

By the way, that first meal may make the tick a fever-carrier. Here's how. The young tick sits waiting on a twig or a tall grass until a meadow mouse brushes by. The tick quickly fastens itself to the animal and starts filling up on blood. If the animal happens to be suffering from fever, the tick takes in fever germs along with its lunch. Later on, that same tick may use you for a meal ticket and pass on to you the germs it took from the sick animal.

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The only way you can take spotted fever is through a tick bite or by contaminating your finger when picking ticks off your dog or some other animal. Of course, not all ticks are infected -- fortunately. And fortunately an infected tick must be attached for some time before it can pass on the germ. But it doesn't pay to take any sort of chances with ticks nowadays. Doctors are reporting about 140 cases of spotted fever each year in the East and South alone. About a quarter of these cases are fatal.

If you have had experience with ticks, you probably know about their mode of attack. As you brush past the place where a tick is waiting hungrily, it fastens to your clothes and then proceeds cautiously to a protected spot to take a meal. Ticks often get on the feet and legs from low plants and then crawl up. A favorite place to settle is in the hair at the back of the neck. A tick steps so softly that you may not feel him crawling. And you seldom feel him bite. Often you can't even feel a tick when you pass your hand over it, because it fastens so close to the skin and has such a smooth back. Not until it begins to swell with your blood, or until you find an itching swelling on your skin do you realize that a tick is about. But if you look yourself over carefully, you can see this insect-- a brownish, flat, eight-legged spot about one quarter the size of your little finger nail--or half an inch long after its meal. When the female tick has filled up on blood, she drops off, seeks a protected place to lay her eggs and start a new generation for next year. The swelling left by a tick bite is caused by a fluid which the tick injects to make the blood run more freely.

Now about controlling ticks. Since both ticks and the small animals they feed on like undergrowth and brush especially in a cool damp place, you will be safer if you cut away undergrowth from near houses or camps, especially those along the water. Also clear away brush from along frequently used paths. If ticks are thick near a permanent camp, you can spray around the camp and trails with creosote oil. This will kill plants and stain clothes that touch it, but it does away with these dangerous insects. Because meadow mice provide easy food for young ticks, they should be destroyed. Then, be sure to examine dogs and horses every few days and always use tweezers or forceps in removing ticks from them. Have a cup of kerosene oil handy to drop the ticks in. Clipping a dog is one way to keep down ticks and dusting him with derris powder frequently also helps.

When you return from an outdoor trip, examine yourself and the children carefully. Make sure that no tick has attached itself to the hair at the back of the head. If you have ticks on your clothes, you can take your outside clothes off before entering the house and fumigate them by putting them in a tight can with a dish of carbon tetrachloride on top. The fumes this liquid gives off as it evaporates will destroy the ticks.

Finally, if you want to know what has been discovered about the tick by Department of Agriculture research under Dr. F. C. Bishopp of the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, you are welcome to Dr. Bishopp's new circular. This is called "The American Dog Tick, Eastern Carrier of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever." It is Circular No. 478. And you obtain a copy by writing to the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C.

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