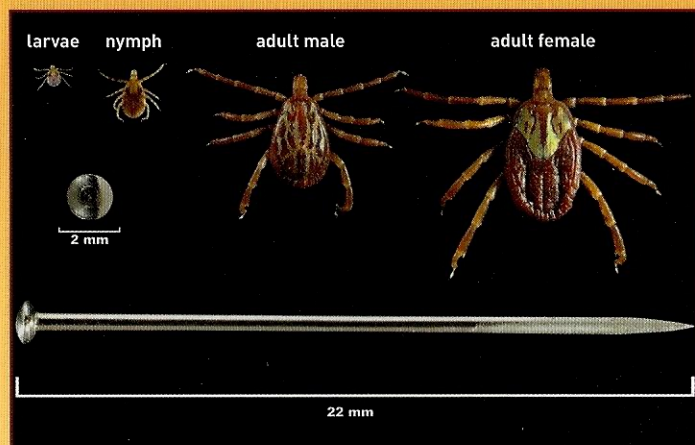


TICK FAMILIES

Ticks are blood-feeding external parasites of mammals, birds, and reptiles. Although more than 800 species have been described, only 9 species are of practical importance in companion animal medicine in the United States. Ticks can be divided into 2 major families: soft ticks (Argasidae) and hard ticks (Ixodidae). Both types of ticks are significant vectors of disease-causing organisms. **Most of the species that infest dogs are hard ticks, classified as 3-host ticks, feeding on a different host during the larval, nymphal, and adult stages.**



Using a pin as a reference tool, this photograph depicts a dorsal view of 4 *Amblyomma maculatum* ticks. From left to right, this group of 4 includes a larval tick (with 6 legs), a nymph, an adult male, and at far right, an adult female. Note that the head of the pin measures just under 2 mm in diameter, while its full length measures 22 mm.

The male has a considerably larger scutum, or “shield” covering the entire dorsal abdomen, whereas the female has a scutum covering only a small section of her dorsal abdomen just behind her head. The smaller scutum in the female enables its abdomen to expand considerably, leading to an engorged appearance after ingesting its host blood meal.

LIFE CYCLE

Ticks have 4 developmental stages: egg, 6-legged larva, 8-legged nymph (1 or more nymphal stages), and adult. In the Ixodidae family, 3-host ticks are of greatest importance to small animal medicine. These larvae and nymphs engorge on blood, then drop off the host to molt into the next life stage. Adults too find a host and engorge on blood. Adults usually mate on the host and then drop off where the females lay a single clutch of thousands of eggs. Three-host ticks may prefer different hosts for each life stage. For example, *Dermacentor* species larvae and nymphs feed on small mammals, whereas the adults prefer dogs; all 3 stages of *Rhipicephalus sanguineus*, however, prefer to feed on dogs. The tick life cycle spans as little as 2 months to more than 2 years, depending on the species.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF TICK REMOVAL

- **DO** grasp the tick firmly with tweezers as close to the head as possible
- **DO** pull the tick straight out with a steady, even pressure
- **DO** disinfect the site of the bite and wash your hands
- **DO** preserve the tick in alcohol for proper classification
- **DON'T** twist or jerk the tick
- **DON'T** use petroleum jelly, grease, hot match, or other methods to remove the tick



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