

Why a tick bite can make you allergic to red meat, other animal products

LEXINGTON Outdoor-loving Kentuckians know that tick bites carry risk.

Many have heard that tick bites can lead to Lyme disease but did you know they can also cause a little-known allergy to red meat and other mammalian byproducts called Alpha-Gal Syndrome? Kentuckians are more at-risk for Alpha-Gal Syndrome (AGS) because the tick that carries the allergy is prevalent here in the Commonwealth.

With warm weather and long days beckoning many a Kentuckian outdoors in the spring and summer, it's best to be aware of AGS, how to avoid it and even how to live with it.

To help better understanding around this unique allergy, UKNow spoke with Arfa Faiz,

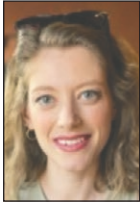
M.D., an allergist with UK HealthCare as well as Jonathan Larson, Ph.D., and Hannah Tiffin, Ph.D., both assistant extension entomology professors in the Department of Entomology at the UK Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment. They explain the basics of AGS, how to avoid it and what lifestyle changes you can



ARFA FAIZ



JONATHAN LARSON



HANNAH TIFFIN

make if you've been diagnosed with the allergy.

Additionally, you can tune into a webinar on the allergy presented by UK Martin-Gatton CA-FE on Thursday, May 29, at 7:30 p.m. Your local extension office may be hosting a watch party.

UKNow: What is alpha-gal syndrome and what causes it?

Faiz: For most allergic conditions in the world, the immune system attacks protein in a food or medication. In this special kind of allergy, the immune system attacks a carbohydrate or sugar molecule called "galactose-alpha-1,3-galactose." Alpha-Gal, as we commonly know it, is an allergy or overreaction to this molecule which is found in most mammalian or red meat.

This allergy presents as rashes, swelling of the face/lips/eyelids, trouble breathing, coughing, wheezing, vomiting, abdominal pain, passing out or similar symptoms. In this case, the reaction occurs typically three to eight hours later. Because these symptoms are delayed, you may wake up with them in the middle of the night after an evening meal.

UKNow: What types of ticks can cause it? Are they more prevalent in Kentucky?

Larson: The tick most associated with AGS in the United States is the lone star tick, which is the most common medically relevant tick species in the Commonwealth. States known to

deal with more lone star ticks are also the states with the highest reported cases of AGS, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention map. Not every lone star tick is a metaphorical "loaded gun." You may be bitten by one and experience no issues with Alpha-Gal. The tick may not be carrying the molecule and individuals react differently to exposure.

UKNow: What can people do to avoid tick bites?

Larson: In Kentucky, the high tick season tends to be April-June, though we can be exposed to ticks on any day above freezing. Kentuckians should be conscious of when they are entering tick habitat, which tends to be overgrown areas with lots of vegetation. They don't thrive in the open sun; therefore, they don't tend to live in places like the bright center of a yard. They prefer the edges of habitats usually.

Tiffin: You can use this intel to make your property more tick safe as well – focusing on areas of highest use and keeping those areas mowed, vegetation well-maintained (reducing brushy areas) and removing leaf litter in the fall from these high-use areas. Reducing wildlife visitors on your property, particularly deer and rodents that can bring ticks with them, can also help reduce your tick exposure.

Larson: After being in "ticky" areas, it's best to do a tick check, first on

your clothes and then on susceptible spots on the body (hair, ears, armpits, belly button, groin, knees and ankles). Getting the lone star tick off of you before it bites is essential. You can further prevent tick bites by wearing skin-based repellants such as DEET or treating your clothing with permethrin. Permethrin is an insecticide, once it dries on the clothes, it will kill any ticks that climb aboard. People who work outdoors or who enjoy outdoor activities often turn to it over DEET.

Tiffin: You can use both of these products in tandem too, and by treating your clothes with permethrin you can still safely perform outdoor activities even if you forgot the DEET at home. It is important to follow all label instructions and treat clothing in ventilated areas away from pets. Permethrin when wet is particularly toxic to cats but is safe around your furry animals after your treated clothes dry.

If you need to be in more "tick risky" areas, for outdoor and agricultural work, you can also wear tall boots or tape the bottoms of your pant legs so that ticks do not find an "alternate route" under your clothing.

UKNow: If a tick does bite me, what should I do?

Faiz: If a tick is found, remove it carefully with tweezers, clean the site, and keep the tick for future identification — you can also take a picture with your phone.

You can see your primary care provider to be evaluated and discuss any new symptoms. If there are no new symptoms, you likely don't need to do be evaluated.

Tiffin: If keeping the tick for future tick identification or testing, you can either put the tick in a plastic bag and freeze it or put it in a small bottle with ethanol — this can be found at your local drug store, pharmacy and many grocery store first aid sections.

Kentucky residents can have ticks identified by going to their local county Extension office for more information.

UKNow: What foods or products might cause a reaction and is there treatment for Alpha-Gal?

Faiz: Alpha-Gal is found in mammalian meats or red meats and their associated byproducts. This includes beef, lamb, goat, pig and even horse products. Think hamburgers, hot dogs, pepperoni, steak, bacon, pork, etc. Rarely, people can react to milk or gelatin made from these animals.

After the diagnosis is confirmed by history taking and testing, the best treatment is avoidance of the meats. If there is accidental ingestion and symptoms develop, the treatment is epinephrine/epipen. Nasal epinephrine is also now available. Antihistamines can help if there is only rash and swelling and no other symptoms. Sometimes in the case of allergic reactions to medications, we need to avoid them long term. It is important to see an allergist to discuss your options.

UKNow: What sorts of lifestyle changes do individuals with Alpha-Gal have to make? Does the allergy ever subside?

Faiz: Living with an allergy can involve changing your lifestyle. A wholly vegetarian or vegan diet is not usually necessary — people can still have fish, chicken and other poultry. Checking ingredients in foods that you eat is important. When eating out at a restaurant, inform the staff about your allergy. For most allergies, there is no cure. For Alpha-Gal allergy, sometimes after avoidance of reaction-causing meats for a period of time — often years — people may be able to resume eating meat in the future.

It is important to note that many medications — Cetuximab, for example, a cancer medication — contains molecules that look like Alpha-Gal. We now know that people with this allergy also react to these medications, so they need to be avoided. Common cautionary ingredients include gelatin, animal-sourced magnesium stearate, glycerin and lactose.

PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE

WESTWOOD VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Board of Commissioners of the Westwood Volunteer Fire District will be holding an election for two Board positions.

One (1) Board position is for a non-firefighter property owner within the Westwood Fire Protection District.

One (1) Board position is for a Firefighter representative and must be a member of the Westwood Volunteer Fire District.

Both positions will be a four (4) year term.

The election will be held on Saturday, June 28, 2025, between the hours of 11 :00 am and 2:00 pm at the Westwood Volunteer Fire District station located at 2039 Main Street W, Ashland, Ky. 41102. Any property owner interested in being placed on the ballot must submit their name and address information to Deputy Chief Charles Cremeans via mail or in person at the Westwood Volunteer District station no later than May 28, 2025

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Boyd County Career and Technical Center is in search of the equipment listed below. If your company sells this equipment and you would like to be submit a bid, please pick up a bid response form from BCPS District Office or Boyd County CTC and return it by 3:00pm on 06/13/25 to the Boyd County Board of Education, 1104 Bob McCullough Drive, Ashland, KY 41102. Interested vendors can contact the Boyd County CTC at 606-928-7120 for specifications.

For Industrial Maintenance:

Laser Alignment Tool
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For Agriculture:

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For Construction:

Industrial Planer, jointer, router table, bead blaster, safety saw, and dust collection.

For Family Science:

Long arm Stationary Machine
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For Health Science:

CPR Training Equipment
Anatomy Table

Industrial Shop Spaces:

Fork Lift

General Purpose:

7-9 Passenger Van

The Boyd County School District reserves the right to reject any or all bids and to award multiple bids.

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