

Utilities Section Newsletter

League of Nebraska Municipalities

June 2026

Tick-borne diseases

*By Jackson Sash,
Utilities Field Rep./
Training Coordinator*

If you have been paying attention to the news, you have likely heard that 2026 is looking to be a terrible year for ticks in the United States. Nationwide in 2026, there have been about 60 emergency room (ER) visits for tick bites per 100,000 ER visits. This is 33% higher than the 10-year average of about 45 per 100,000 ER visits.

Ticks can be carriers of several serious, even potentially fatal, diseases including Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and alpha-gal syndrome. Tick bite prevention is critical to reducing disease transmission.

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that is spread by the bite of an infected blacklegged tick. The longer an infected tick is attached to a host, the higher the chance of Lyme disease being transmitted. It is rare for the host to become infected when the tick is attached for less than 24 hours, but not unheard of. Most cases come from ticks that were attached for more than 24 hours. Typical symptoms include fever, headache, fatigue, and the characteristic “bullseye rash” (formally called Erythema migrans rashes). Most cases are treatable with antibiotics but if left untreated, infection can spread to the joints, heart, and nervous system.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is another bacterial infection which is spread by the bite of either an infected American dog tick or Rocky Mountain wood tick. Unlike other tick-borne diseases, RMSF generally is transmitted within the first 24 hours of an infected tick attaching. Symptoms include sudden fever and headache, rash, nausea and vomiting, stomach pain, muscle pain, and a lack of appetite. RMSF can be difficult to diagnose as the rash often appears late in the illness and can appear in many different patterns. If left untreated, RMSF can progress and quickly become deadly. While this disease is treatable with the antibiotic doxycycline, patients with severe cases can be left with hearing loss, mental disability, or damaged blood vessels leading to amputations.

Alpha-gal syndrome is different from the other two tick-borne diseases mentioned previously because it is an allergy to the sugar molecule alpha-gal. Alpha-gal is naturally produced in the bodies of mammals except for humans, apes, and old-world monkeys. It is also found in the saliva of some ticks, mainly the lone star tick. When a tick bites and attaches, it can transfer some alpha-gal from its saliva into



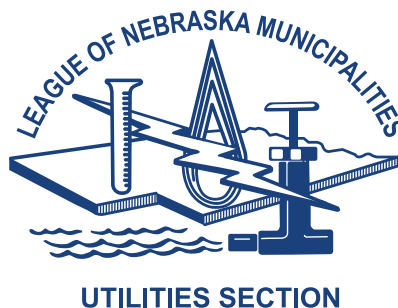
the blood. The body’s immune system identifies it as foreign and can determine it to be a threat. When this happens, impacted people develop an allergy to red meats and other animal products like pork, beef, lamb, some dairy products, and some medications. Symptoms range from mild to severe and can vary from day to day. There is no cure for alpha-gal syndrome, only management of the symptoms.

Avoiding encounters with ticks is a great way to prevent contracting these three tick-borne diseases. Before going outside, know where to expect ticks. The primary habitat for ticks is grassy, brushy, or wooded areas. This includes urban environments such as parks, yards, and gardens.

You can also treat clothing with 0.5% permethrin which repels ticks and other insects. Permethrin will remain on clothing for several washes. EPA-registered insect repellants that contain DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, para-menthane-diol, or 2-undecanone are all safe and

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Tick-borne diseases

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effective repellents when used as directed. If using sunscreen, apply the sunscreen first and the insect repellent second.

When you have returned indoors, check your clothing, body, gear, and pets for ticks. Ticks can ride on these and later attach to you or someone else. Taking a shower soon after being outdoors can also help wash away unattached ticks and has been shown to reduce the risk

of getting Lyme disease.

While performing a check of your body, be sure to check under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, the back of the knees, in and around the hair, between the legs, and around the waist and ankles. Ticks will often attach to hosts in warm and dark areas where they feel protected. Be vigilant with your prevention and you can significantly reduce the chances of contracting these diseases.



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When a native tree becomes a problem

By Jackson Sash,
Utilities Field Rep./
Training Coordinator

Drive across Nebraska today and you'll see eastern red cedar trees covering hillsides, filling shelterbelts, lining fence rows, and creeping into pastures that were once open grassland. While eastern red cedar is native to Nebraska and can serve useful purposes when planted intentionally for windbreaks or wildlife cover, its rapid spread across the state has created

serious challenges for landowners, communities, and utility systems. What was once a scattered presence in certain areas has unfortunately become a dominant and costly part of the landscape.

Historically, Nebraska's prairies experienced regular fires that helped keep cedar seedlings from becoming established. Those natural fire cycles, along with grazing patterns and open grassland conditions, limited the tree's spread for generations. Today, modern fire suppression, changes in land use, and birds spreading



cedar seeds over long distances have allowed eastern red cedar populations to expand dramatically.

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power & equipment show

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power & equipment show

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THURSDAY, JULY 30
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When a native tree becomes a problem

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In many areas, what began as a few scattered trees has turned into dense stands covering hundreds of acres, especially in pastures, along waterways, and on unmanaged land.

One of the most significant impacts is water consumption. Eastern red cedars remain active throughout much of the year and can use substantial amounts of groundwater, even during cooler months when many other plants are dormant. Dense cedar infestations can reduce stream flows, decrease groundwater recharge, and increase competition for limited water resources. In some watersheds, heavy cedar growth can also contribute to drier soils and reduced moisture availability for surrounding vegetation. In a state where every gallon of water matters, particularly during drought conditions, widespread cedar encroachment can have measurable effects on local water supplies and long-term watershed health.

Wildfire risk is another growing concern. Eastern red cedar contains volatile oils that burn readily and intensely, making it one of the more dangerous trees in a fire situation. Dense cedar stands can transform a relatively manageable grassfire into a fast-moving crown fire capable of producing extreme heat, heavy smoke, and long-range ember showers. Once ignited, cedar trees can burn explosively, creating conditions that are difficult for firefighters to control. The recent wildfires across Nebraska have demonstrated how cedar-infested areas can significantly increase fire behavior and make suppression efforts more difficult. Municipal utilities located near cedar stands may face elevated risks to water facilities, lift stations, electrical infrastructure, communication equipment, and other

critical assets.

The spread of cedar trees also creates challenges for utility maintenance and public works operations. Trees growing near power lines increase trimming costs, raise the risk of outages, and can complicate storm response when branches or entire trees fall during high winds or ice events. Cedar roots and dense growth can make access to buried infrastructure more difficult, while thick stands around facilities can interfere with inspections, mowing, and routine maintenance. Municipalities may find themselves spending increasing amounts of time and resources managing vegetation around utility sites, drainage areas, and other public properties.

From an ecological standpoint, eastern red cedar can dramatically alter Nebraska's native grasslands. As cedar density increases, sunlight reaching the ground decreases, reducing the growth of native grasses and wildflowers. Over time, this can change the structure of the entire plant community and reduce the diversity

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When a native tree becomes a problem

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of species that depend on open prairie conditions. Wildlife species such as grassland birds, pollinators, and other native animals may lose important habitat as cedar stands expand. For livestock producers, the loss of productive grassland can also reduce grazing capacity and lower the overall value of pastureland. In some cases, cedar invasion can make land less usable and more expensive to restore.

Fortunately, eastern red cedar can be managed when addressed early. Small trees can often be removed mechanically before they begin producing seeds, which

helps prevent further spread. Prescribed fire remains one of the most effective tools for controlling cedar establishment in grassland areas, especially when used as part of a long-term management plan. In some situations, a combination of cutting, burning, and follow-up monitoring is needed to keep cedar from returning. Many Nebraska communities, natural resources districts, conservation groups, and landowners are working together to control cedar expansion before it becomes more costly and difficult to manage. Early action is usually far less expensive than trying to remove mature stands later.

For municipal officials and utility personnel, eastern red cedar serves as a reminder that even a native species can become problematic when natural controls are removed. Monitoring utility properties, rights of way, drainage corridors, and municipal lands for young cedar trees today can help avoid larger maintenance, safety, and infrastructure challenges in the future. A proactive approach to cedar management can protect water resources, reduce wildfire risk, improve access to critical facilities, and help preserve Nebraska's grassland landscapes for years to come.



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Maintenance/Water and Wastewater Operator.

The Village of Clearwater is seeking a full-time maintenance/water and wastewater operator. Applicant must hold or be willing to obtain a Grade IV Water Operators Certificate and a Class I Wastewater License with the State of Nebraska; hold or be willing to obtain, at minimum, a Class B State of Nebraska CDL driver's license; have the ability to operate large equipment and vehicles; read and interpret gauges, understand electrical and mechanical equipment used in the regular operations of water and wastewater systems; make minor repairs to water and wastewater systems; ability to maintain and make minor repairs to vehicles and equipment; ability to supervise others, withstand extreme weather conditions, distinguish colors, lift up to 75 pounds, crawl, climb, bend, stoop, reach and work in confined spaces and at extended heights. Applicant should reside or be willing to relocate within five miles of Clearwater village limits. Duties will include, but are not limited to: street maintenance, including patching and snow removal; maintenance, upkeep, testing and recordkeeping of water, wastewater, and backflow systems; mowing and weed eating for all village properties; maintain park and playground, including trash removal; maintain tree dump and ensure only authorized items are being dumped; animal control; and other responsibilities as required or requested by supervisors. For more information, contact Angie Hupp at 402-485-2365 or clerk@clearwaterne.com. The Village of Clearwater is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Electric Journeyman Line Worker.

The Village of Morrill (Population 934) is accepting applications for the position of full-time Electric Journeyman Line Worker with a pay range of \$30-\$50 per hour DOQ. This individual will perform skilled line work in the operation, construction, maintenance, and repair of overhead and underground electric distribution and transmission systems. A Class B CDL with Airbrakes is required. Applications, with resumes, will be accepted until the position is filled. A complete job description for this position and an application is available at www.villageofmorrill.com or at the Village Office located at 118 S Center Avenue, Morrill, NE. This position includes an excellent benefit package including health insurance, retirement, vacation, sick leave, and paid holidays. The Village of Morrill is an Equal Opportunity Employer. The Village does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and veteran status. This applies to all employment decisions, including hiring, training, and promotions. The Village celebrates diversity and are committed to creating an inclusive environment for all employees and all hiring decisions are based on merit, skills, and business needs.



Two Super T Series Self-Priming Centrifugal Pumps.

The Village of Sterling has two Gorman-Rupp Pumps for sale: Model #T4A71S-B/F; Imp. Diameter STD; Unit weight 675 lbs. One is new in the crate, and the other was used for a short time. Both have been in storage for some time. The Village of Sterling upgraded and these are just taking up space. [Click here](#) for pump specs and pictures. Contact the Village of Sterling at 402-866-4545 for questions or to schedule a time to come look at them.



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2026 Training Calendar

Visit our [website](#) for a complete list of workshops and conferences.

July

July 29-30..... [NECC Power & Equipment Show](#) NECC Chuck Pohlman Ag Complex, Norfolk

August

Aug. 11 Water Operator Training Workshop O’Neill

Aug. 12 Backflow Workshop Wayne

Aug. 13 Water Operator Training Workshop Fremont

September

Sept. 15 Water Operator Training Workshop Gering

Sept. 16 Backflow Workshop Ogallala

Sept. 17 Water Operator Training Workshop Lexington

Sept. 23-25 ... League Annual Conference Cornhusker Marriott Hotel, Lincoln

October

Oct. 20 Water Operator Training Workshop Ainsworth

Oct. 21 Water Operator Training Workshop St. Paul

Oct. 22 Backflow Workshop Beatrice

December

Dec. 8 Water Operator Training Workshop Joe Hampton Conference Center/LNM, Lincoln

Dec. 10 Water Operator Training Workshop Auburn

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