Tick Surveillance Scheme - guidance

www.gov.uk/guidance/tick-surveillance-scheme

The Tick Surveillance Scheme (TSS), set up by Public Health England (PHE) in 2005 is the only scheme that records tick distributions on a national scale.

Tick samples sent to us are identified and provide us with valuable information on the distribution and abundance of the various species present across the UK, their seasonal activity and their host associations.

The main aims of the surveillance scheme are to:
- promote the surveillance of ticks in GB
- monitor tick distribution on a nationwide scale
- determine the diversity of ticks commonly infesting humans and animals
- detect exotic/unusual tick species

All records are available via the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) gateway for research and public use.

How to take part

Individuals and groups are invited to send in any ticks collected, along with the completed recording form available from our website (www.gov.uk/guidance/tick-surveillance-scheme).

Each tick must be accompanied by a record of the date and location of collection and the host from which the tick was removed. If you provide us with your email address, we will notify you with the results of the identification.

If more than one tick is collected from different hosts or locations please place these in separate containers, clearly labelled. Ticks collected from the same host on the same day may be sent in one container. To prevent deterioration of the ticks, place them in a fridge or cool, dark place and post as soon as possible.
Testing ticks

PHE do not routinely test individual ticks for pathogens (such as the bacteria that cause Lyme borreliosis), as rates of infection in ticks varies seasonally and geographically, and the presence of a pathogen does not necessarily mean that transmission will have taken place.

Instructions on how to safely remove ticks:

- using a pair of forceps or tweezers, or tick removal hooks (do not use fingers), grip the head of the attached tick, as close to the point of attachment on the skin as possible
- gently apply pressure and pull steadily upwards, without twisting and taking care not to crush the tick
- place the tick/s in a plastic container and ensure the lid is securely fastened
- wash hands after tick removal
- label the container so that the accompanying details recorded can be identified
- place sealed container in an envelope and post to the address below.
- should you develop any symptoms of illness (rash, fever, flu-like symptoms) following tick removal, please seek advice from your GP

How to send ticks

Please send any ticks collected in a crush-proof, plastic container (plastic vials can be supplied on request) along with the details outlined above to:

Tick Surveillance Scheme
Public Health England
Porton Down
Salisbury
SP4 0JG

The Royal Mail requests that live specimens are carefully packaged for posting, so that there is no danger of the ticks escaping or posing any risk to mail handling staff if the package becomes damaged during transit. Please use the screw-top plastic containers provided or ensure that other crush-proof containers are securely fastened (eg with tape). Please post the container in a padded envelope with a visible return address and mark the package as 'urgent - live creatures'.
Postage costs

Unfortunately, we are not able to cover the cost of postage, however we can provide you with plastic tubes and envelopes on request. Please email us at tick@phe.gov.uk or put a note on your recording form.

Depending on how many ticks you are sending or the size of the tubes you are sending them in, the cost of postage may vary. Below is a guide, correct in April 2017 (http://www.postoffice.co.uk/price-finder).

Large letter (max thickness 2.5cm, max 100g) – our usual vials in small padded envelope will fit this category.
1st class = 98p, 2nd class = 76p

Small parcel (max thickness 16cm) – larger containers, eg universal tubes used by vets, will need to go in these.
1st class = £3.40, 2nd class = £2.90

‘Signed for’ and ‘next day’ delivery is considerably more expensive. It is not necessary to post specimens using these services.

If you are submitting many samples, you can group them in envelopes to save postage, providing that each sample is placed in a separate container with separate recording forms attached.

It should cost under a pound to send a tick into the TSS if you use the supplied materials.
How will my information be stored / used in the future?

The data you provide on this form will be kept confidential and anonymous in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act.

We will store your name and contact details (section 3) in case we need to follow up with a specific query relating to your tick record. By submitting this form, you agree that your name, contact details (postal address, email address and/ or telephone number) will be held on a database so that you may be contacted.

By completing sections 1-3, we understand that you are consenting only to receive feedback on the identification of your specimen, and you are under no obligation to take part in any future studies. Your contact information will not be made available to anyone else. Only the research team will have access to your information which will be stored on a password-protected computer and will be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Signing the form is optional and any advice given will not be affected. By signing the form, you give your consent to be contacted by Public Health England for future research. You may be invited to participate in research into the understanding of ticks and tick borne diseases.

Once your data has been analysed, it may be used in publications in academic journals and reports. It may be presented to a variety of academic and professional audiences but you will not be identified. By submitting this form, you agree that the information and tick specimens may be anonymously used for research purposes.

If you wish to have your data deleted for any reason, please contact the researchers and, wherever possible, your request will be obliged.

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