Ticks at Woodford

Over the last few months several of the workers on-site, especially those clearing the area beside the workshop, have been bitten by ticks. In my case, after working on the sidings near the workshop, I have had two tick bites. The most recent, resulted in some swelling in neck which required a course of the antibiotic Doxycycline. The experience made me look at what are recommended treatments for tick bites. Most of the government medical websites have appropriate information and recommendations.

What are ticks

Common bush ticks or scrub ticks often attach to people. Ticks bury themselves in the skin and scalp. Some Australian ticks release venom into the blood. If a tick attaches, there may be swelling, redness and pain in the area. Other symptoms may take a few days to develop, including blurred vision, headache, weak legs and arms and unsteady walking. In rare cases ticks can carry bacteria which may cause illness.

Strategies to lower the chances of tick bites include:

- Keep your skin covered in areas where there might be ticks. Wear a long-sleeved shirt and tuck it into your trousers. Tuck your trousers into your socks and wear a wide-brimmed hat.
- Wear light-coloured clothing to make it easier to see ticks.
- Use an insect repellent that contains DEET, picaridin or lemon eucalyptus. Use an insecticide that contains permethrin on your clothes when in areas where ticks are found.
- Avoid bush and long grass, especially after rain.
- Brush your clothes and check your skin for ticks before going inside.

After you leave the area, check your whole body for ticks. Look carefully at the back of the head and neck, groin, armpits and back of the knees.

Management of tick bites in Australia

The following information has been extracted Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care Factsheet "Management of tick bites in Australia":
https://www.allergy.org.au/patients/insect-allergy-bites-and-stings

Current advice stresses the importance of establishing whether a person who has been bitten by a tick has an allergy to tick bites. Subsequent medical management of the patient with a tick bite is highly dependent on the whether the person has an allergy or not.

Management of tick bites in people who are allergic to tick bites

People with severe allergic reaction may collapse or have trouble breathing. It is vital for anyone with a known tick allergy to seek urgent medical attention as soon as they are aware of an attached tick and not attempt to remove it without medical help. For patients with known tick allergies, removing the tick must occur in a hospital or emergency department in the event of anaphylaxis occurring when the tick is removed.

First aid for tick bites

People who are not allergic to ticks should safely manage the tick bite by not disturbing the tick and killing the tick where it is without delay.

DO NOT scratch or disturb a tick

- Do not scratch anything that itches until you have had a look at it, or scratch anything you can't see if you live, work, volunteer or play in a tick-endemic area.
- Do not disturb a tick, squeeze, agitate, jerk, or twist a tick, as this will make it more likely that the tick will inject its saliva into the person.
- Do not use irritant chemicals such as methylated spirits, kerosene, petroleum jelly, nail polish, oil, or alcohol; or use a lighted match; as these do not work and may cause the tick to burrow deeper into the skin.

DO NOT try pulling the tick out with household tweezers or fingernails

- Do not try 'picking' a tick out of the skin with household tweezers, fingernails, or other tick-removal gadgets.
- It is unsafe to insert fine tweezers between the skin and the tick mouthpiece and lever the tick out without killing the tick first. This does not prevent tick allergy or anaphylaxis, and therefore this method is not advised.

DO kill the tick where it is

- An ether-containing spray, Tick Off®, is available to kill ticks in situ. In most cases ether-containing sprays will kill the tick within 5 minutes, and it will drop off the skin later.
- If the tick does not drop off, or cannot be frozen, advice is to leave the tick in place and seek urgent medical assistance to have the attached tick safely managed and removed.