Ticked Off

Yes, these tiny bloodsucking bugs can transmit Lyme disease.

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Like vampires, ticks feed on a host's blood. When ticks cling to unsuspecting passersby to continue dining, an infected insect, at any stage of its growth, may give its meal ticket Lyme disease.

To avoid these creepy critters, steer clear of wooded and bushy areas with high grass and leaf litter. In addition, walk in the center of trails, apply chemical insect repellents that contain DEET or permethrin to exposed skin and clothing (follow the instructions carefully) and thoroughly check your family's and pets' bodies, clothing and gear after they spend time outdoors. What's more, take a bath or shower, and wash and dry clothing on high heat for at least one hour—this should kill any ticks you don't find.

If left untreated, Lyme disease— named after a town in Connecticut, where it was first reported—can cause a variety of heart, brain and nerve problems, as well as arthritis. The good news is that Lyme disease responds to antibiotics. A full recovery is possible if it's caught early.

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