

Safety Tips



It starts with Scouts.

May 2015

Lyme disease and Ticks

Ticks are tiny arachnids (aka bugs) that live off the blood of mammals, birds, and sometimes reptiles and amphibians. Ticks are typically found in grassy, wooded areas or along shorelines and in parks – all the places Scouts like to go! To feed, ticks attach their heads into the skin of a host's body and can remain there up to five days drinking blood. They are not necessarily noticeable at first, but as they drink their bodies become engorged and noticeably larger. Since blood is their primary food source, ticks are also known for spreading disease, like Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is becoming an increasing issue within Canada as climate change is allowing more Ticks to migrate north. Ticks are also the primary carriers of the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi* that causes Lyme disease. It is important when returning from areas where ticks may be found that you check your clothes and entire body for ticks.

Encourage youth to do the same, and tell them to be especially careful to check those places on the body where a tick is most likely to be found. When checking for ticks, make sure to include the head, neck and behind the ears.



If you find a tick, properly remove it as soon as possible. Ticks can stay attached to skin (feeding on blood and growing larger—gross!) for five or more days. However, removing a tick within a few hours can prevent Lyme disease, because the bacteria will not yet have been transmitted from the tick to the individual. This is not always the case, so it's important you watch your bite for signs of infection.

If a tick is buried deep in your skin, see a health professional. A tick will become more embedded the more time passes, making it difficult to properly remove it yourself.



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Tick Removal

You cannot remove a tick by covering it with grease or gasoline, or by holding a match against the tick. This does not work and may increase the chance of getting an infection. If you do find a tick, follow these steps:

- Use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick close to the skin surface.
- Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Try not to twist or jerk, which can cause the mouthpart of the tick to break off and remain in the skin. If this happens and you are unable to remove the mouthpart easily with clean tweezers, leave it alone and let the skin heal.
- Clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol, an iodine scrub, or soap and water.
- Put the tick in a clean container, and contact your local public health unit. While Lyme disease is increasingly common in Canada, not all black-legged ticks carry it. As Lyme disease spreads to more ticks, it is increasingly important that ticks be identified and tested. Do your part to help.

Early and late stage Lyme disease symptoms

It is important to be aware of the early and late stage symptoms of Lyme disease. Early detection is paramount when treating Lyme disease; the longer left untreated the harder it is to overcome.

- If bitten by a tick, watch your bite area. Red bull's-eye rashes are synonymous with Lyme disease but less than 50% of people will get any over-emphasized rash. (CanLyme)
- Early symptoms are often flu-like, such as: fever, headache, nausea, jaw pain, light sensitivity, red eyes, muscle aches and neck stiffness.
- Some people experience immediate symptoms after infection, others may have none for many months.
- Lyme is known as the "great imitator" as it mimics many other illness.

Common late stage symptoms include: Stiff or painful neck, jaw pain, tingling of the fingers or toes, numbness in limbs, headaches, blurry vision, dizziness, fatigue, joint or bone pain, memory loss or confusion, panic attacks and anxiety, and overall weakness.



Prevention

Of course, it's better to avoid a tick than to be bitten by one. Be aware that you're likely to encounter ticks during the spring, summer and fall in wooded areas or in fields with tall grass. Stay on clear trails to reduce the likelihood of getting a tick. Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts that are bright colours so you may see any ticks on you. And put on some deet bug repellent (use as directed on the bottle); it's good for more than mosquitoes and blackflies!

For more information on Lyme disease within Canada, visit:

- [Government of Canada - Lyme Disease](#)
- [Canadian Lyme Disease Foundation](#)
- [International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society](#)