

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is an infection caused by a bacteria transmitted through the bite of an infected tick. Not all ticks carry Lyme disease – in Ontario, Lyme disease is spread by the bite of an infected **blacklegged tick**, commonly known as the deer tick.

With warming global temperatures, populations of blacklegged ticks are growing and expanding into new areas. This means that the risk of contracting Lyme disease is on the rise across Canada. Shaded, humid habitat—such as tall grassed, bushy, wooded, or forested areas—is preferred by ticks.

Adult ticks are about the size of a sesame seed, while the immature nymphs can be as small as a poppy seed. Both adults and nymphs can carry the bacteria that cause Lyme disease.



Symptoms

Symptoms usually begin within three days to one month after being bitten by an infected tick. **If you develop symptoms, see your physician.** Symptoms can include:

- Circular, red rash (sometimes called a “bull’s-eye” rash), slowly expands around the tick bite area. However, a rash is not always present.
- Fever or chills
- Muscle and joint pain
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Swollen lymph nodes



What if I find a tick?

If you find a tick on your body, remove it as soon as possible. The risk of getting Lyme disease increases with the length of time the tick remains attached to your body. Since Ottawa is now considered an at-risk area for Lyme disease, it is important to contact your doctor if you believe a tick has been attached to you for 24 or more hours, or if you are unsure how long the tick has been attached to you, so that your doctor can determine if you need treatment with antibiotics. Treatment with antibiotics would be considered when:

- the tick has been attached for 24 or more hours or is fully or partially engorged and
- it has been less than or equal to 72 hours since the tick has been removed.

Your doctor will advise you about what should be done straight away. Immediate actions include watching for symptoms of Lyme disease for one month and, if appropriate, taking a single dose of antibiotics prophylactically.

If the tick was attached for less than 24 hours and its body does not appear swollen from feeding or if you removed a tick and more than 72 hours have passed, you should still be on the lookout for signs and symptoms of Lyme disease for one month. If you do develop symptoms, consult your health care provider.

How to remove a tick?

- Use fine-pointed tweezers.
- Grasp the tick’s head as close to the skin as possible and pull slowly until the tick is removed.
- Do not twist or rotate the tick. Do not use a match, lotion or anything else on the tick.
- Wash the bite site with soap and water.



- If you are going to see your physician and want to bring the tick with you, place the tick in an empty pill vial or zip-lock bag with a moistened paper towel.
- *Coming soon* – For help with identifying a tick, submit a picture through “eTick” (etick.ca), an electronic tick identification platform.
- You can dispose of a live tick by flushing it down the toilet, or placing it in a sealed bag/container and disposing it with your household garbage.

Prevent a Tick Bite

To avoid tick bites, take these easy steps to protect yourself:

- Apply an approved insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin and clothing.
- Wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, shoes and socks and tuck your pants into your socks.
- To make spotting ticks easier, wear light coloured clothing.
- If possible, stay on the trails when hiking in the woods or walking in long grass.
- Do a “full body” check on yourself, your children, and pets for ticks. Pay careful attention around your toes, knees, groin, armpits and scalp.



Help make your environment less favourable to ticks:

- Keep the grass in your yard mowed.
- Remove brush and fallen leaves from the edges of your property, especially if your yard is bordered by woods or fields of tall grass. Add a wood chip or gravel border to separate forested and lawn areas.
- Clean up areas under and around bird feeders; to reduce the attraction of small critters such as mice and voles.
- Discourage deer from entering your yard; as ticks also feed on these animals.
- Place children’s play structures away from wooded areas.

Steps to reduce your pet’s exposure to ticks

If your pet spends lots of time outdoors, a tick check should be part of your daily routine. While dogs and cats cannot directly transmit Lyme disease to people, a tick may enter your home on your pet’s back and move on to bite a human.

To help reduce the chances of your pet carrying a tick that may transmit Lyme disease:

- Talk to your veterinarian about ways to protect your pet from ticks. There are many topical products that can help repel or kill ticks, and for dogs there is a vaccine.
- Check your pet daily for ticks, especially if it spends time in wooded or overgrown areas.
- Remove any ticks right away and dispose:
 - » Use fine-pointed tweezers.
 - » Grasp the tick’s head as close to the skin as possible and pull slowly until the tick is removed. Do not twist or rotate the tick. Do not use a match, lotion or anything else on the tick.
 - » Wash the bite site with soap and water.
 - » Dispose of a live tick by flushing it down the toilet, or placing it in a sealed bag/container and disposing it with your household garbage.
 - » When your pet is examined by a veterinarian, ask for a thorough tick check.



For more information visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Lymedisease.

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