

Notice to Cottagers on the Risks of Lyme Disease in Ontario

adapted from the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care

Lyme disease is an infection caused by the corkscrew-shaped bacteria, *Borrelia burgdorferi*. In Ontario, these bacteria are spread by the bite of blacklegged ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*). Although there are other types of ticks in Ontario (e.g. dog ticks), only the blacklegged tick can transmit Lyme disease. Dog ticks are larger and common all over Ontario, while blacklegged ticks are smaller with established populations occurring sporadically throughout Ontario. The adults are fairly easy to see on clothing, but the nymphs are much smaller, harder to see and can transmit Lyme disease too. Ticks cannot fly and usually come in contact with people or animals by positioning themselves on tall grass and bushes and grabbing on when you walk by.



Figure 1: Dog tick



Figure 2: Blacklegged tick



Figure 1: Blacklegged nymph (dark speck on thumb nail)

In Ontario, blacklegged ticks are more commonly found in areas along the north shores of Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, and the St. Lawrence River. Locations with established blacklegged tick populations infected with the Lyme disease agent include: Long Point Provincial Park, Turkey Point Provincial Park, Rondeau Provincial Park, Point Pelee National Park, Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area, Wainfleet Bog Conservation Area, and in the St. Lawrence Islands National Park area. The precise boundaries of these established tick populations are difficult to define but it is anticipated that some of these populations will continue to expand into neighbouring areas. Blacklegged ticks are also known to feed on migratory birds and as a result, they can be transported throughout the province. Therefore, while the potential is low, it is possible for people to encounter blacklegged ticks, or to be infected with Lyme disease from the bite of an infected blacklegged tick almost anywhere in the province.

The Ontario Ministry of Health has a provincial campaign to help educate the public on Lyme disease. Visit their website for more information:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/lyme-disease>

Personal Protection Measures:

- Wear light coloured clothing (it's easier to spot them on you)
- Long sleeves and pants
- Pants tucked into your socks (super cool, but they can't get to your skin)
- Apply DEET to pants and shirt
- Check yourself after going out. Check clothing first, then when you are home check your skin. A tick that has imbedded itself can be very small (like a mole) so be thorough.

Most symptoms of Lyme disease in humans usually appear between three and 30 days after a bite from an infected blacklegged tick. You should contact your local public health unit or speak to a health care professional right away if you have been somewhere that ticks might live and experience any of the following symptoms:

- rash
- a bull's-eye rash (a red patch on the skin that is usually round or oval and more than 5 cm that spreads outwards and is getting bigger)
- a bruise-like rash (usually on darker skin tones)
- another type of unusual rash
- fever
- chills
- headache
- stiff neck
- muscle aches and joint pains
- fatigue (more tired than usual)
- swollen lymph nodes
- spasms, numbness or tingling
- facial paralysis

If not treated, Lyme disease can make you feel tired and weak and, if it gets really bad, it can even harm your heart, nerves, liver and joints. Symptoms from untreated Lyme disease can last years and include recurring arthritis and neurological problems, numbness, paralysis and, in very rare cases, death.

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If you have a tick bite or are concerned about Lyme disease, please contact your local health unit or physician for more information.

You can upload images to e-Tick for identification: <https://www.etick.ca/>