

Protect yourself from Lyme disease when enjoying summer

Exploring the great outdoors can be great fun, but not if you develop Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is a serious illness that's present in Canada and spreading, says the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

Canadians at risk from Lyme disease include those who live, work or play in proximity to ticks that spread the illness.

If not identified and treated early, Lyme disease can cause serious health issues, says the PHAC.

The disease can be spread by the bite of blacklegged ticks that are infected with the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*.

In regions where blacklegged ticks are found, people can come into contact with ticks by brushing against vegetation while doing things like golfing, hiking, camping and gardening.

While not all blacklegged ticks carry Lyme disease, the populations of infected blacklegged ticks are growing, says the PHAC.

Blacklegged ticks can be ac-

tive throughout much of the year however the risk of a tick bite is highest in the spring and summer.

Blacklegged ticks are most often found in forests and the overgrown areas between woods and open spaces, although it's possible to be bitten outside of those areas.

Ticks don't move far by themselves but they can attach to migratory birds and may fall far from their original location.

Blacklegged tick populations have been confirmed in southern and eastern Ontario as well as in parts of British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

As ticks are very small and their bite is usually painless, you may not know you've been bitten.

Ticks can be infected with more than one type of bacteria that can cause illness in humans so guarding against tick bites will protect you from more than just Lyme disease.

Initial symptoms differ from person to person, and some

people will not experience any symptoms, which makes Lyme disease difficult to diagnose, notes the PHAC.

Some may experience mild symptoms like a fever or a skin rash soon after being bitten while others may suffer severe symptoms, but not until weeks after the bite.

Signs and symptoms of Lyme disease can include one or a combination of the following in varying degrees of severity:

- Fatigue
- Fever or chills
- Headache
- Muscle and joint pain, spasms or weakness
- Numbness or tingling
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Skin rash
- Cognitive dysfunction, dizziness
- Nervous system disorders
- Arthritis and arthritic symptoms
- Heart palpitations

Untreated, symptoms can last years and include recurring arthritis, neurological problems, numbness and pa-

ralysis. Although not common, fatalities from Lyme disease have been reported. If you develop symptoms of Lyme disease, contact your healthcare provider right away as the earlier you receive a diagnosis the greater the chance of successful treatment. If you saved the tick that bit you, bring it with you to your medical appointment as it may help the doctor in assessing your illness.

Getting a diagnosis of Lyme disease can be difficult because symptoms vary from one person to another and may be similar to other infectious diseases that are spread by ticks, says the PHAC.

Symptoms are an important part of getting a diagnosis because lab results may not always detect Lyme disease in the early stages if you were recently on antibiotics.

Blood tests are clearer when the disease is further along.

Lyme disease can be effectively treated with 2-4 weeks of antibiotics. Depending on your symptoms, and if you are diagnosed in the later stages of the

disease, you may require a longer course of antibiotics.

Some people experience symptoms that continue more than six months after treatment.

The Public Health Agency of Canada offers the following ways to protect yourself if you venture into forests or overgrown areas:

- Wear closed-toe shoes, long-sleeved shirts and pants
- Pull your socks over your pant legs to prevent ticks from crawling up your legs
- Wear light-coloured clothing to spot ticks easier
- Use insect repellents that contain DEET or Icaridin. Repellents can be applied to clothing as well as exposed skin.
- Shower or bathe within two hours of being outdoors to wash away loose ticks
- Do daily full body checks for ticks on yourself, your children and your pets
- If you find a tick on your skin, removing it within 24-36 hours usually prevents infection.

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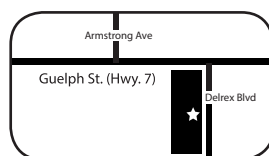


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