

Lyme Disease

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is an infection caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*. In Ontario, these bacteria are spread to humans by the bite of blacklegged ticks, also called the deer tick.

Risk of exposure to Lyme disease

The risk of exposure to Lyme disease is highest in places where blacklegged ticks are established. In Ontario, ticks carrying the bacteria have been collected in Point Pelee National Park, Rondeau and Turkey Point provincial parks, Long Point peninsula, including Long Point Provincial Park and the national wildlife area, Wainfleet bog near Welland on the Niagara peninsula, Prince Edward Point, parts of Thousand Islands National Park.

Other risk areas included for encountering a blacklegged tick include locations around Kingston, along the St. Lawrence Valley to the border with Quebec and northeast towards Ottawa, western Ontario in the region of Lake of the Woods, Pinery Park on the shore of Lake Huron, Rouge Valley region of eastern Toronto. The risk of contact with ticks begins in early spring when the weather warms up and lasts through to the end of fall.

Symptoms of Lyme disease

Not all tick bites will result in disease and the symptoms and health effects caused by Lyme disease can vary for each person. The most common symptom is a red bull's-eye rash that appears at the site of the tick bite between 3 and 30 days after the bite (average 10 days).

Flu-like symptoms can also develop, such as:

- Skin rash
- Headache
- Fever or chills
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Spasms or weakness
- Numbness or tingling
- Swollen lymph nodes

The later stages of Lyme disease can include:

- Dizziness
- Abnormal heart beat
- Muscle and joint pain
- Paralysis (unable to move parts of our body)
- Mental confusion or inability to think clearly

These symptoms can occur weeks, months or even years after the initial symptoms have cleared.

If you have been bitten by a tick and develop the symptoms mentioned, contact your doctor immediately.

Treatment

If detected early, Lyme disease can usually be treated with antibiotics. Lyme disease that goes undetected can develop into a serious, chronic infection that is more difficult to treat.

Ticks

Ticks are very small. They vary in size and colour depending on their age and whether they have been feeding. Ticks must feed on blood from an animal or person to live. They feed by inserting their mouth into the skin of a person or animal.

Not all ticks carry Lyme disease. The American dog tick, which is the most common tick found in Lambton County, does not carry Lyme disease. The blacklegged tick, which is not commonly found in Lambton, can spread the Lyme disease bacteria to humans.



Blacklegged Tick

American Dog Tick

(Image Courtesy of Public Health Agency of Canada)

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Preventing tick bites

When entering areas with tall grass, bushes and wooded areas where ticks live, take the following precautions:

- When walking outdoors, stick to the trails and avoid direct contact with plant growth.
- Wear light-coloured clothing. It makes ticks easier to spot.
- Wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, socks, closed-toed shoes and a hat. Tuck your shirt in your pants and pants in your socks.
- Apply an insect repellent that contains 20%-30% DEET* to clothing or skin. Avoid your eyes and mouth area.
*Health Canada and the Canadian Paediatric Society have recommended amounts.
- Put a tick and flea collar on your pet. Check them every so often to see if they have ticks. Pets can bring ticks inside your house.
- Do a **tick check** on yourself, your family and your pets after being outdoors. Pay extra attention to scalp, groin and armpits. Infected ticks are unlikely to transmit Lyme disease to the host if removed quickly, so early detection is very important.

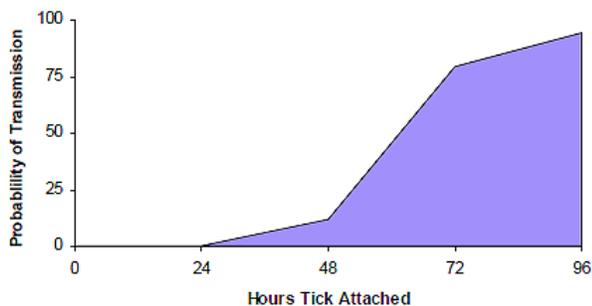


Image courtesy of Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Removing ticks

Remove any ticks that you find on the skin or clothing promptly. Ticks are most likely to spread the bacteria after being attached to your skin and feeding for more than 24 hours.

- NEVER use a match, heat or chemicals to remove a tick.
- Do not kill the tick before it is removed.

- Remove the tick using tweezers. Grab the tick's head as close to the skin as possible, pulling it straight out with steady pressure. Do not twist the tick or it may break off in the skin.
- Clean and disinfect the bite area.

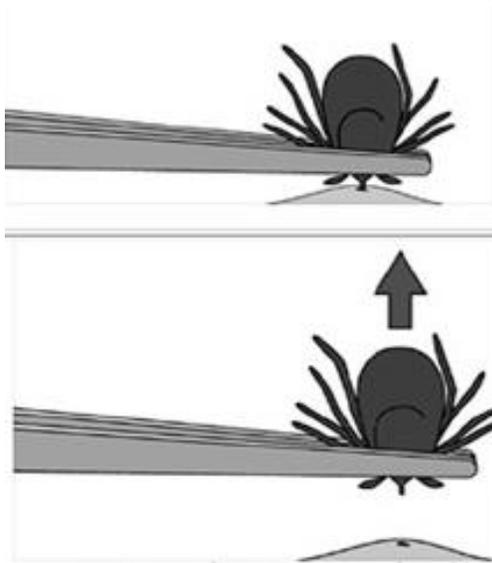


Image courtesy of Centers for Disease and Prevention

Submitting ticks for identification

Save the tick alive in a jar, screw-top bottle, or a doubled zip-lock bag. Bring it to Lambton Public Health (160 Exmouth Street, Point Edward) for identification during normal business hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Please note: only ticks found on humans or human related cases will be submitted for identification as of April 2009. For more information contact Lambton Public Health at 519-383-8331 or toll free at 1-800-667-1839.