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Time to talk ticks

As the weather starts to warm up, people across the Interior Health region are spending more time outdoors. This can mean an uptick in tick bites.

Ticks are small bugs, about the size of a sesame seed, which feed on the blood of humans and animals – and, sometimes, transmit diseases. Ticks are prevalent throughout the Interior and are typically found in tall grass and wooded areas.

Tick species and symptoms

Signs of many tick-borne infections can be quite similar and include fever, headache, muscle pain, and rash.

Wood Ticks (*Dermacentor andersoni*), the species most commonly found through the Interior Health region, do not carry the Lyme disease bacteria – they can carry other diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever, however.

Ixodes ticks (*Ixodes pacificus* or *Ixodes angustus*) are the species that transmit Lyme disease. They are more common throughout coastal B.C. but may be present in some Interior Health areas. While less than one per cent of Ixodes in B.C. carry Lyme disease, it is important to recognize the symptoms. In addition to a fever, headache, and muscle pain, people infected with Lyme disease will often develop a rash that looks like a “bull’s eye” target which expands from the site of the tick bite.

Lastly, some ticks have toxins that can cause temporary muscle weakness and paralysis if left attached for several days. Once the tick is removed, symptoms fade.

What to do

It is important to remove ticks found on people and pets. To do so, wear gloves and use needle nose tweezers to gently grasp the tick close to the skin. Pull the tick straight out without squeezing it. After it is removed, clean the area with soap and water. If the tick is alive (live ticks can be tested for Lyme disease), you can save it in a sealed container with a cotton ball soaked in water. Record the date of the bite on the container. If you have concerns or need assistance removing a tick, please contact your doctor or visit a walk-in medical clinic.

Although most tick bites are harmless, it is important to watch for signs of illness and see a doctor as soon as possible if you notice a bull’s eye rash or other symptoms. If you saved the tick, bring it with you to your medical appointment.

Fortunately, a number of precautions can be taken to prevent tick bites and tick-related illnesses. For example, you should:

- Walk on cleared trails when in tall grass or wooded areas.
- Cover up by wearing a hat, long sleeves, and pants.
- Wear light-coloured clothing to help spot ticks easily.
- Tuck pant legs into socks or boots.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET on uncovered skin.

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- Check clothing and scalp (covered or not) when leaving an area where ticks may live – ask someone to help check hard to reach areas.
 - Have a shower after returning from areas where ticks may live.
 - Regularly check household pets for ticks.

To help keep ticks away from your home and yard, you can:

- Keep your lawn short and remove any fallen leaves and weeds.
- Keep a buffer area such as wood-chip or gravel border between your lawn and wooded areas or stone walls. Any play equipment or play zones should be kept away from wooded areas.
- Trim tree branches to allow more sunlight in your yard.
- Keep wood piles and bird feeders away from the house.
- Widen and maintain trails on your property.

Learn More

- [Ticks and Lyme Disease](#) – Interior Health
- [Tick Bites and Disease](#) - HealthLink BC
- [Tick Talk](#) – BC Centre for Disease Control