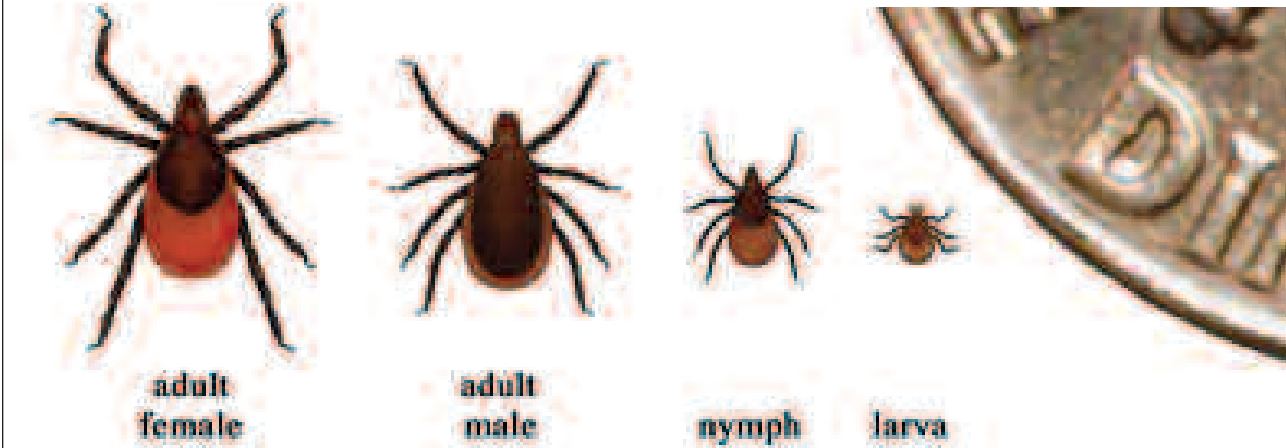


HOME & GARDEN



Do Tick Checks Often Blacklegged Tick (*Ixodes scapularis*)



Blacklegged Tick as related to the size of a Dime coin. (Photo courtesy Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

By Maurice Rees

Blacklegged ticks have been found throughout Nova Scotia so it is important to be aware and to take some simple precautions.

There are several ways to prevent or reduce contact with ticks when in areas with long grass, shrubs or woods: wear light-coloured, long-sleeved shirts, pants and socks so ticks are more visible, and enclosed shoes; pull socks up over pant legs and tuck in shirts; spray clothing and exposed skin with an insect repellent containing DEET or Icaridin; check clothing and exposed skin for ticks after working or playing outside and remove any ticks attached

to the skin; when possible, take a bath or shower within two hours of coming indoors; this makes it easier to find ticks and washes away loose ones and keep grass well cut to minimize suitable habitat for ticks on your property

Tick checks also help prevent Lyme disease. Removing ticks as soon as possible can prevent or reduce the risk of infection.

Blacklegged ticks can only transmit the bacterial infection after they have been attached to the skin for at least 24 hours.

Infected blacklegged ticks can spread a bacterial infection through bites. Lyme disease is best treated early with antibiotics.

The earliest and most common symptom of Lyme

disease is a bull's-eye rash at the site of the bite, although the rash is not always in this shape.

Other symptoms include fever, fatigue, muscle aches

and headaches. Anyone who has been in areas with long grass, shrubs or woods and has these symptoms should seek prompt medical attention.

How Ticks Find Their Hosts

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Ticks can't fly or jump. Instead, they wait for a host, resting on the tips of grasses and shrubs in a position known as "questing". While questing, ticks hold onto leaves and grass by their lower legs. They hold their upper pair of legs outstretched, waiting to climb onto a passing host. When a host brushes the spot where a tick is waiting, it quickly climbs aboard. It then finds a suitable place to bite its host.

The tick feeding process makes ticks very good at transmitting infection:

Depending on the tick species and its stage of life, preparing to feed can take from 10 minutes to 2 hours. When the tick finds a feeding spot, it grasps the skin and cuts into the surface. The tick then inserts its feeding tube. Many species also secrete a cement-like substance that keeps them firmly attached during the meal. The feeding tube can have barbs which help keep the tick in place.

Ticks also can secrete small amounts of saliva with anesthetic properties so that the animal or person can't feel that the tick has attached itself. If the tick is in a sheltered spot, it can go unnoticed.

A blacklegged tick will attach to its host and suck the blood slowly for several days. If the host animal has certain bloodborne infections, such as the Lyme disease agent, the tick may ingest the pathogen and become infected. If the tick later feeds on a human, that human can become infected.

After feeding, the blacklegged tick drops off and prepares for the next life stage. At its next feeding, it can then transmit the infection to the new host. Once infected, a tick can transmit infection throughout its life.

If you remove a tick quickly (within 24 hours) you can greatly reduce your chances of getting Lyme disease. It takes some time for the Lyme disease-causing bacteria to move from the tick to the host. The longer the tick is attached, the greater the risk of acquiring disease from it.



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