

Educate yourself about ticks; do "tick-checks" often

By Dr. Ryan Sommers,
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As the temperature rises, many of us will be spending more time enjoying the outdoors in Northern Nova Scotia. There are a number of things you can do to protect yourself and your family's health when we are enjoying our local hiking trails, spending time in our backyards and enjoying our green spaces. Bringing adequate amounts of water, putting on sunscreen and wearing proper footwear are a few examples. Additionally, it's also important to take steps to reduce the risk of being bitten by a tick.

Nova Scotia is a suitable climate for many types of ticks. The black-legged tick (also called the deer tick) can carry and transmit the bacterial infection that causes Lyme disease. This infection initially appears as a rash near the tick bite. It may look like a bulls-eye target, and it usually appears 7 to 10 days after the bite. It can show up approximately 3 to 30 days afterward. Infected individuals also can experience flu-like symptoms such as fever, headaches, tiredness, stiff neck, joint and muscle pain. If identified early by a health care professional, it can

be treated with antibiotics.

Here are some things you can do to help prevent tick bites and Lyme disease:

Educate Yourself about Ticks

Recognizing what a black-legged tick looks like is an important first step. Black-legged ticks are much smaller than dog ticks. They have no white markings on the large part of the body; whereas dog ticks usually have white markings or silver colored spots. Unattached ticks can also vary in size depending on the stage of

their life cycle. Very small (young) ticks, called nymphs, can be the same size as a poppy seed. Larger adult male and female ticks are similar in size to a sesame seed.

Black-legged ticks are found throughout our province, and Northern Nova Scotia is now considered a higher risk area for Lyme disease. These types of ticks thrive in damp woods and forests where there is shade and leaf litter to provide cover. It's important to note that

black-legged ticks cannot jump or fly. They attach to their host by climbing on plants and waiting for the host to rub against them. They then climb onto the host body and try to attach and feed.

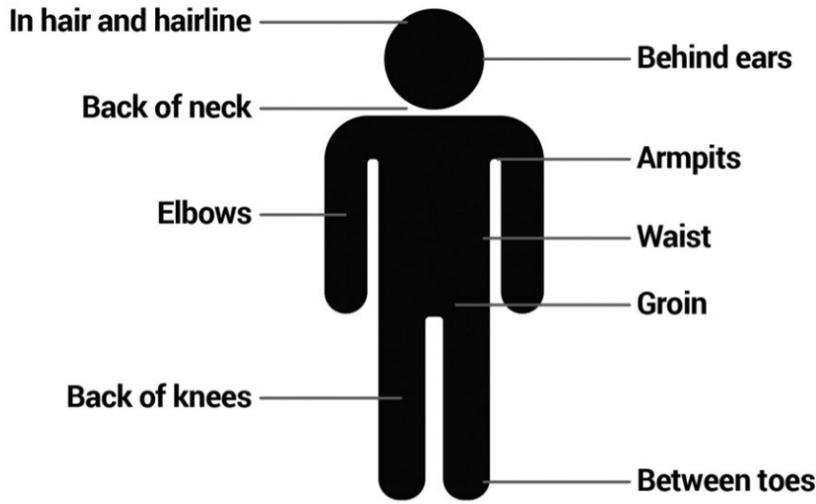
Adult black-legged ticks are most active in the spring and fall. They can remain active until the first snowfall or until the air temperatures are consistently below 4°C. Larvae and nymphs (younger ticks) are usually more active in the spring and summer.



Left to right: female black-legged tick, groundhog tick, dog tick (<https://novascotia.ca/ticksafety/>)



Top to Bottom: Engorged female dog tick, engorged female black-legged tick. (<https://novascotia.ca/ticksafety/>)



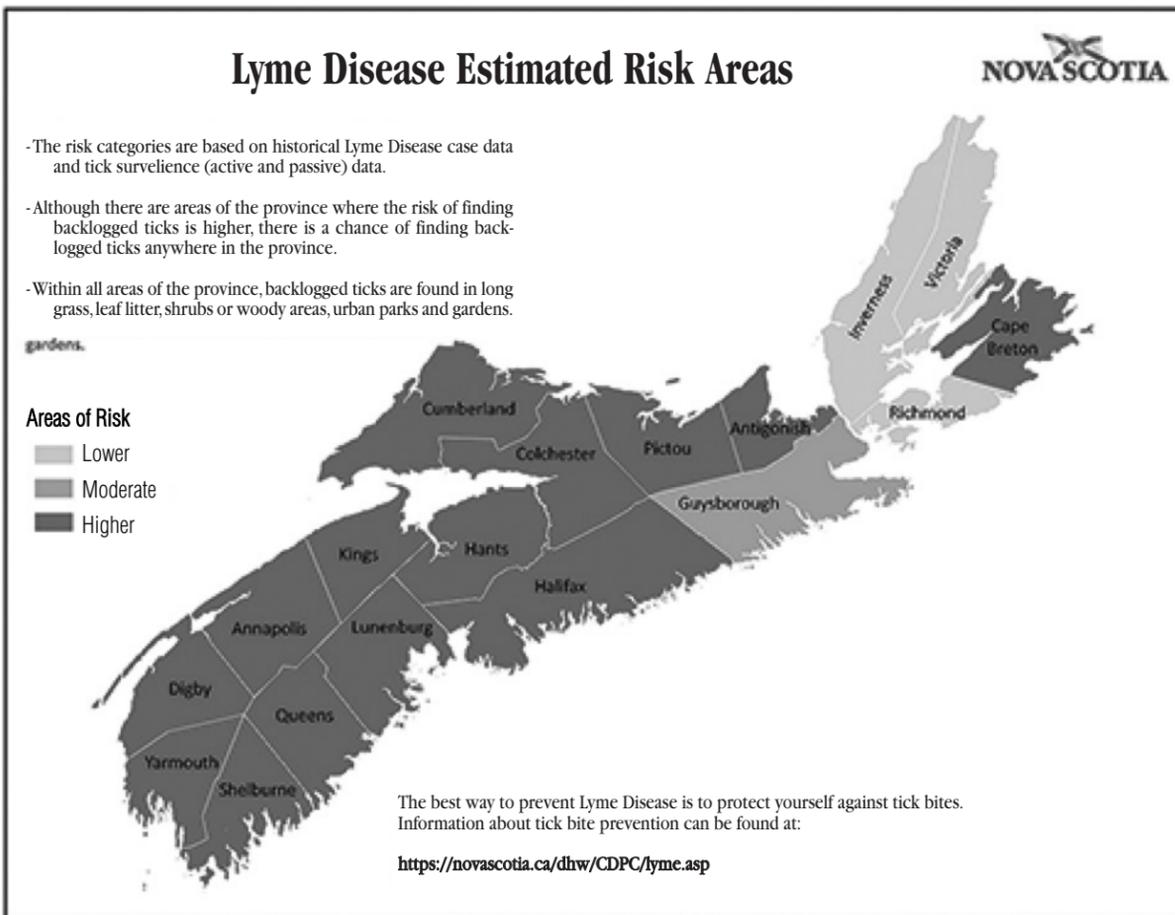
Protect Yourself from Ticks

You can protect yourself from ticks by:

- Using insect repellent that contains DEET or Icaridin. Follow the directions on the package carefully. DEET use is different for different ages. Do not use DEET or Icaridin on infants less than six months old.
- When traveling outdoors, cover as much of your skin as possible whenever you are in an area where ticks are found. Wear covered shoes and tuck your shirt into your pants. Tuck your pant legs into your socks. Also, wear light-colored clothing with a tweed weave. This will help you see ticks more easily.
- When hiking, walk along a well-traveled path, stick to the center of the trail and avoid contact with the long grasses and vegetation along the trail's edge.
- Check yourself, your children, and your pets after walking in grassy or wooded areas. Look for unattached ticks. Feel for bumps and look for brown spots on the skin. Pay special attention to armpits, the back of the knees and the groin or pelvic region. Taking a bath or shower within two hours of being outdoors can also help.

See also Karen Casey's column on page 5

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Removing a Tick

If you do find a tick attached to you or someone else, remove the tick as soon as possible to help prevent the transmission of the bacteria that causes Lyme disease.

Carefully grasp the tick with pointed tweezers. Try to grab the tick as close as possible to the skin.

Next, gently and slowly pull the tick straight out using a consistent force. Remember not to jerk, twist or squeeze it. After the tick is removed, clean the area with soap and water, rubbing alcohol or hydrogen peroxide to prevent skin infections.

Remember to make a note of the date you found the tick,

what part of the body the tick was attached to and the geographic location you think you may have picked up the tick.

Once removed you can flush the tick down the toilet, drown it in rubbing alcohol or freeze it in a plastic sealed bag before putting it in the garbage. Try to prevent crushing the tick with your exposed fingers. Additionally, you can submit the tick for identification (i.e., black-legged tick vs. another type) to the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History or to the Public Health Agency of Canada (see the additional resource links for more information)

Lawn Maintenance

There are also a number of landscape modifications to help create an environment unattractive to ticks and their animal hosts.

- Keep your yard sunny and dry. Prune bushes and trees to let in sunlight and air.
- Keep lawn mowed short and remove leaf litter.
- Clear tall grasses and brush around your home and at the edge of your lawn.
- Put children's swings, slides, and sandbox in sunny, dry places away from yard edges and trees.
- Keep your woodpile neat, dry, off the ground, and away from your house.

For more information about Landscape management options, please visit: <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/CDPC/documents/Landscape-Management-Handbook.pdf>

By following these tips, you can help prevent tick bites and have an enjoyable summer. To learn more about tick safety and Lyme disease in Nova Scotia, please visit the below websites. <https://novascotia.ca/DHW/CDPC/Lyme.as> <https://novascotia.ca/ticksafety/>

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