

Where are Blacklegged ticks found?

Blacklegged ticks have been found in all areas of Nova Scotia. No matter where you live, there is the possibility that you may come in contact with a blacklegged tick.

Blacklegged ticks survive best in locations that provide them with moist habitat. Wooded or forested areas are very suitable because the trees provide shade and leaf litter for ground cover to protect active ticks.

Adult blacklegged ticks are most active in the spring and fall and they remain active until the first permanent snowfall or when air temperatures are consistently below 4°C. Larvae and nymphs are most active in the spring and summer months.

Blacklegged ticks cannot jump or fly. Instead, they seek hosts by climbing on vegetation such as grasses or shrubs and waiting for a host to rub against them. When this occurs, they climb onto the host's body and eventually attempt to attach and feed.

Ticks may be brought into the home on clothing or pets but most indoor environments are too dry for blacklegged ticks to survive for more than a few days.

How can I reduce the number of Blacklegged ticks around my home?

While you cannot completely eliminate the ticks on your property, you can use simple landscaping techniques and yard maintenance to reduce the number of Blacklegged ticks around your home. Ticks thrive in humid wooded areas.

To help reduce ticks around your home:

- Remove leaf litter and clear tall grasses and brush around your home and at the edge of your lawn.
- Keep lawns mowed short and clear brush and leaf litter from your lawn frequently.
- Put playground equipment in sunny, dry places away from wooded areas, yard edges, and trees.
- Place wood chips or gravel between your lawn and any wooded areas to stop ticks from moving into areas used by family and pets.
- Keep the ground under bird feeders clean. Place feeders in dry, sunny places away from your house.
- Add hard surfaces (such as decking, stone, tiling, or gravel) around your house and property. Use these surfaces for outdoor activities.
- Keep your woodpile neat, dry, off the ground, and away from your house.
- Keep your yard sunny and dry by pruning bushes and trees to let in sunlight and air.

For more information

For more information on Lyme disease, visit the Health and Wellness website at www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/cdpc/lyme.asp, or call your local Public Health Services office. The website will be updated regularly with any new information about Lyme disease and the spread of infected ticks.

Public Health Services offices:

Amherst	667-3319 or 1-800-767-3319
Antigonish	867-4500 Ext 4800
Bridgewater	543-0850
Dartmouth	481-5800
New Glasgow	752-5151
Sydney	563-2400
Truro	893-5820
Wolfville	542-6310
Yarmouth	742-7141

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Lyme Disease

Protect yourself from tick bites



What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection transmitted to humans and pets by a bite from a Blacklegged tick. Ticks are arthropods closely related to spiders. Ticks stick to skin and feed on blood. Tick bites can occur in spring, summer or fall.

In Nova Scotia only the Blacklegged tick can carry the bacteria that causes Lyme disease and not all Blacklegged ticks carry the bacteria. The tick that carries the bacteria can only transmit Lyme disease after it has filled itself with blood, which takes at least 24 hours.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

In most cases, the first symptom of Lyme disease is a rash near the tick bite that may look like a bull's eye target (see photo below). The bite is often painless, so you may not even know that you have been bitten. The rash usually appears between 7 to 10 days after the bite, but the range is between 3 and 30 days.

You may also develop flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache, tiredness, stiff neck, soreness all over, and pain or swelling in the joints.

These symptoms may appear in stages and may occur over a period of months.



Bull's eye rash

Photo: N.Y. Medical College

How is Lyme disease treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat Lyme disease. Early treatment almost always results in full recovery.

If left untreated, more serious symptoms or illnesses may develop, although they are not common. These include nervous system problems such as facial palsy, heart problems, or chronic joint problems such as arthritis. These symptoms, when caused by Lyme disease, can also be cured by antibiotics. Occasionally, arthritis may continue if antibiotics treatment is delayed too long. Lyme disease is rarely life threatening.

How do you get Lyme disease?

You get Lyme disease from the bite of a Blacklegged tick (that carries the bacteria) only. The tick must be attached to skin for at least 24 hours to transmit the bacteria. You cannot catch Lyme disease from an infected person.

How is Lyme disease diagnosed?

See your doctor immediately if you have symptoms of Lyme disease. Explain when and where a tick was attached to your skin or how you were exposed to ticks. Your doctor will examine you and may order tests. Tests require a blood sample.

How are Blacklegged ticks identified?

Nova Scotia has many types of ticks. For Lyme disease, the tick of concern is the Blacklegged tick, also called the deer tick. Ticks most commonly feed on wild and domestic animals. The photo below shows the difference between the Blacklegged tick that carries Lyme disease and the dog or wood tick that does not.

- Blacklegged ticks are smaller than dog or wood ticks. They have no white markings on the large part of their bodies.
- Ticks are normally carried on wild animals, but they can also be carried on domestic animals such as dogs, cats, and horses.
- Ticks cannot jump or fly. They live mostly on grass and shrubs. Ticks may attach themselves to animals or people that walk through the grass or brush past the shrubs.

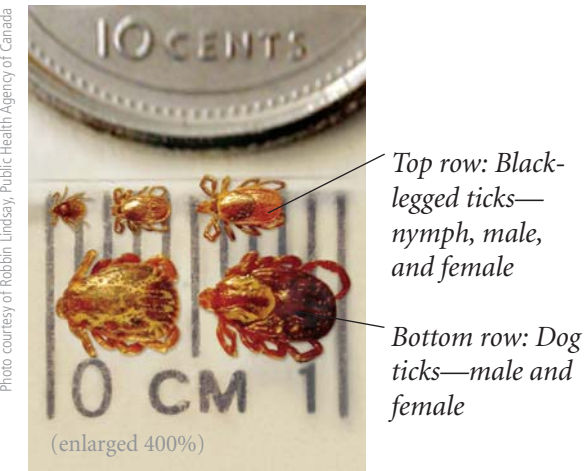


Photo courtesy of Robbin Lindsay, Public Health Agency of Canada

Top row: Black-legged ticks—nymph, male, and female

Bottom row: Dog ticks—male and female

The Blacklegged tick does not always have black-coloured legs. Dog ticks usually have white or silver-coloured spots.

What can I do to prevent Lyme disease?

Prevent Lyme disease by avoiding Blacklegged tick bites, checking often for ticks, and removing ticks before they do any damage.

In areas where Blacklegged ticks are established:

1 Protect yourself from ticks.

- Use insect repellent containing DEET. Follow manufacturer's directions, which vary by age. Do not use DEET on children under 6 months.
- Cover as much of your skin as possible when walking, working, or playing in areas where ticks are found. Wear enclosed shoes, tuck your shirt into your pants, and tuck your pant legs into your socks.
- Wear light-colored clothing with a tight weave to see ticks more easily.
- Walk on well-traveled paths away from high grass and other vegetation.

2 Check yourself, your children, and your pets after walking in grassy or wooded areas.

- Check clothing.
- Inspect all parts of the skin, including arm pits, groin, and scalp.
- Bathe or shower.

3 Remove ticks as soon as you find them.

- Carefully grasp the tick with tweezers as close to the skin as possible.
- Gently and slowly pull the tick straight out. Do not jerk, twist, or squeeze it.
- Disinfect the site with soap and water, rubbing alcohol, or hydrogen peroxide to avoid other infections.

4 Record the date and location of the tick bite.

- Contact your doctor promptly if a rash or flu-like symptoms appear.