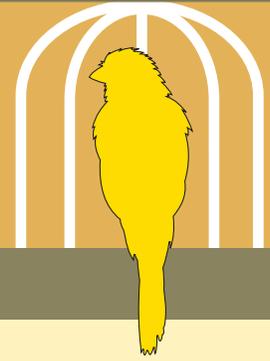


# Lyme Disease and Ticks



HEALTH AND SAFETY FACT SHEET

**CUPE** / Canadian Union  
of Public Employees



Lyme disease is a potentially serious illness caused by a bacteria called *Borrelia burgdorferi*, most commonly transmitted by bites from ticks. Symptoms may mimic those of the flu and include headache, fatigue and fever. Lyme disease is frequently, though not always, accompanied by an expanding rash that can take on the appearance of a “bull’s eye” shape. Most cases can be treated easily with a round of antibiotics lasting several weeks.

Left untreated, Lyme disease can spread to the joints, heart and nervous system leading to far worse conditions including paralysis, mental confusion and additional nervous system

disorders. There are many species of ticks present in Canada, but those most likely to carry the disease are blacklegged (or deer) ticks and western blacklegged ticks.

## **Who is at risk?**

Anyone’s whose job duties include working outdoors in the summer is at risk of exposure to ticks. Outdoor municipal workers, staff at municipal or provincial parks, among others, face exposure as a regular occupational hazard. Deer ticks are often found in tall grass where they wait to attach to a passing deer or other warm-blooded mammals including humans.

At the time this of publication, Health Canada was reporting that confirmed or suspected areas of the country that contain ticks that can cause Lyme disease include Nova Scotia and the southern parts of New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia. For an up-to-date map of where blacklegged ticks can be found, visit <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/disease-maladie/lyme/causes-eng.php>

### Exposure prevention

The best prevention is to stop the ticks from being able to bite.

If you work outdoors, especially in the areas mentioned above, your employer should develop safe work procedures in consultation with the health and safety committee. These procedures should require the use of protective clothing such as closed-toe boots, long-sleeved shirts and long pants tucked into socks or shoes. Light-coloured clothing can help workers spot ticks easier.

For workers at risk of heat stress, consideration should be given to reduce the risk associated with the additional heat exposure caused by the heavier clothing. The use of insect repellants, especially those containing DEET, can also make bites less likely, though application directly to the skin should be minimized.

Before removing their clothes, workers should inspect them for the presence of ticks. Workers should also carefully check their bodies for ticks. Before feeding, ticks are small and may look like a freckle or a mole. After feeding, they become engorged and are significantly larger and easier to spot. Before they bite, ticks will move around on a body and find a warm and protected area to bite such as the back of the knees, the groin or

armpits. Removing the tick within 24 to 36 hours will reduce the risk of infection.

If you discover a bite, consult a physician immediately. A treatment with antibiotics can further reduce the risk of infection.

### What if you have been bit?

If you find a tick that has bit you:

1. Using clean tweezers, carefully grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible. Pull gently and slowly upward, being careful not to twist or crush the tick, as this will increase the likelihood of bacterial release. You should not attempt to burn ticks off your skin. If you are not comfortable removing a tick, see a health care provider as soon as possible.
2. Once the tick has been removed, wash the area where you were bitten with soap and water or disinfect it with rubbing alcohol.
3. If parts of the tick's mouth break off and remain in your skin, remove them with tweezers. If this is difficult to do, consult a physician.
4. If you were able to remove the tick or parts of it, keep it in a zip-lock bag or pill bottle. Record the location and date of the bite and bring it with you when you consult your physician.

### References:

<http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/disease-maladie/lyme/causes-eng.php>

<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/diseases/lyme.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/>



**FIND MORE RESOURCES:** [cupe.ca/health-and-safety](http://cupe.ca/health-and-safety)

Contact us: CUPE National Health and Safety Branch, 1375 St. Laurent Blvd.,  
Ottawa, ON K1G 0Z7 tel (613)237-1590 fax (613) 237-5508 [health\\_safety@cupe.ca](mailto:health_safety@cupe.ca)