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## Time to talk ticks

Spring has arrived and people across the Interior Health region are spending more time outdoors. This can mean an increase 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. They are easiest to spot on a person or pet when they are actually sucking blood. Ticks burrow part way into the skin, bite, draw blood, and then drop off. The feeding tick's mouth will be under the skin, but the back parts will be sticking out. When they are full of blood they are usually blue-grey in colour. This is called an engorged tick.

### Tick species and symptoms

General symptoms of tick-borne infections include fever, headache, muscle pain, and rash.

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

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 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.

Certain ticks may release 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.
- 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.

**More information is available at:**

- Ticks and Lyme Disease – Interior Health: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/CommunicableDiseaseControl/Pages/Ticks.aspx>
- Removing a Tick <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/zm6150>
- HealthLink BC file: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile01.stm>
- Tick Talk – BC Centre for Disease Control : [http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/a-z/\\_/LymeDisease/ticktalk/ticktalkvideos/TickTalkVideoEnglish.htm](http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/a-z/_/LymeDisease/ticktalk/ticktalkvideos/TickTalkVideoEnglish.htm)

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*Interior Health is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and providing a wide range of quality health-care services to more than 740,000 people living across B.C.'s vast interior. For more information, visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca), follow us on Twitter [@Interior\\_Health](https://twitter.com/Interior_Health), or like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth](https://www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth).*