

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

May 24, 2024

Protect Yourself from Tick Bites this Spring and Summer

With the warmer weather upon us and many residents and visitors enjoying more time outdoors, the Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) would like to encourage you to take precautions to prevent tick bites and reduce the risk of contracting tick-borne disease.

Ticks are very small and hard to see. In northwestern Ontario there are two main tick species: wood (dog) ticks and blacklegged (deer) ticks. Wood ticks are not known to transmit disease, but blacklegged ticks can transmit tick-borne diseases, including Lyme disease, to humans.

“Preventing blacklegged tick bites is an important step in preventing tick-borne disease,” says Thomas Nabb, Manager of Environmental Health.

You can help to prevent tick bites by:

- Covering up.
 - Wear light colored clothing so it is easier to see ticks, closed-toed shoes, long-sleeved shirts, and long pants tucking into your socks.
- Use insect repellent.
 - Use a product with DEET or Icaridin. Be sure to follow the product label guidelines especially for use on infants, children, and pregnant women.
- Put clothes in the dryer.
 - Heat will kill ticks, choose high heat setting for 10 minutes.
- Check yourself, your children, and your pets for ticks after being outdoors.
 - You can also shower as soon as you can to wash off unattached ticks.
- Talk to your veterinarian about options to protect your pet.
- Maintain your property.
 - You can help keep blacklegged ticks away from your property by:
 - keeping your grass short, trim bushes and tree branches to let in sunlight (ticks avoid hot, dry locations).
 - creating a border of gravel or woodchips one metre or wider around your yard if you are next to a wooded area or an area with tall grass.
 - moving children’s swing sets, playground equipment and sandboxes away from wooded areas and consider placing equipment on a woodchip or mulch foundation.

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Ensure ticks are removed as soon as possible. If a blacklegged tick is attached to a person or animal, it is important you do not crush or damage the tick so it does not pass germs that can cause tick-borne disease from the tick into your body. Follow these steps:

- Use clean fine-tipped tweezers and grasp the head of the tick as close to the skin as possible.
 - Do not use a lit match or cigarette, nail polish or nail polish remover, petroleum jelly (i.e.: Vaseline), liquid soap or kerosene to remove the tick.
- Pull it straight out, gently but firmly.
 - Do not jerk or twist the tweezers while pulling the tick out. Do not squeeze the tick.
- Once you have removed a tick, wash your skin with soap and water and then disinfect your skin and hands with rubbing alcohol or an iodine swab.
- You can submit a photo of the tick to etick.ca for species identification.
- NWHU no longer accepts ticks from the public for testing. Tick testing is not used to diagnose tick-borne disease in humans.

NWHU performs active tick surveillance (tick dragging) in the spring and fall to track the migration of tick populations throughout our region and identify if they carry tick-borne disease. The 2023 active surveillance data shows that microorganisms that cause Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, babesiosis and Powassan virus were present in blacklegged ticks collected.

If you have health concerns after a blacklegged tick bite, consult a health care provider as soon as possible. You can also check if your pharmacy is prescribing medication to treat tick bites and prevent Lyme disease. In most cases Lyme disease can be prevented through treatment with antibiotics.

For more information contact your local health unit office or visit our website at www.nwhu.on.ca.

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Media Contact:

Thomas Nabb
Manager of Environmental Health
Northwestern Health Unit
807-468-3147 ext. 301224
tnabb@nwhu.on.ca