

September 2017

**RE: Lyme Disease**

Dear Principals, Staff, Parents, Guardians, and Students:

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection transmitted by a certain species of ticks known as the blacklegged tick, sometimes called the deer tick. Though usually seen in the summer, ticks are still active in the fall. It is therefore important to be aware of ticks while enjoying the outdoors.

Blacklegged ticks are very small – sometimes as small as the period at the end of this sentence. Though blacklegged ticks in Nova Scotia can carry the bacteria that causes Lyme disease, not every blacklegged tick will carry it.

The first symptom of Lyme disease is usually a rash that may look like a bull's eye target near the tick bite. The rash can appear anywhere from 1-30 days after the bite. Symptoms such as fever, headache, tiredness, stiff neck, pain and swelling in the joints and general body aches and pains may develop. Symptoms may appear over a period of months. If symptoms appear, it is very important to contact a health care provider. Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics.

Follow these steps to help protect against ticks, especially in grassy, wooded or shrub-covered areas where ticks are more likely to be found:

- Apply insect repellents containing DEET or icaridin to exposed skin and clothes. Follow the directions on the package carefully.
- Wear light-colored long-sleeved shirts and pants, closed-toed shoes, and tuck shirts into pants, and pant legs into socks.
- Keep lawns mowed short. Check out other landscaping tips for discouraging ticks at <http://novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/documents/Landscape-Management-Handbook.pdf>
- Put playground equipment in sunny, dry places away from wooded areas, yard edges, and trees.
- Check your whole body for ticks. Don't forget under your arms, in and around your ears, inside your belly button, back of your knees and in and around your body hair. Check your children and pets too.
- When possible, take a bath or shower within two hours of coming indoors. This makes it easier to find ticks and washes away loose ones.
- If you find ticks, here's how to remove them safely:
  - Carefully grasp the tick with tweezers as close to the skin as possible.
  - Gently and slowly pull the tick straight out to prevent jerking, twisting or squeezing it.
  - Clean and disinfect the site with soap and water, rubbing alcohol, or hydrogen peroxide.
  - Dispose of the tick in a sealed plastic bag and put in the garbage.
  - Burning, squeezing or coaxing a tick's mouthparts from your skin using other methods is not recommended.

To access a great educational video for kids about how to protect against tick bites, and to learn more about Lyme disease and blacklegged ticks, visit <http://www.novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/lyme.asp> - or call your local Public Health office at 902-481-5800.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Arnason', is centered on a light green rectangular background.

Trevor Arnason MSc., MD, CCFP, FRCPC

Regional Medical Officer of Health – Central Zone, Nova Scotia Health Authority

# Lyme Disease General Information

## What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection transmitted by a certain species of ticks known as the blacklegged tick, sometimes called the deer tick. Ticks, seen mostly in summer months, are small insects that will stick to the skin and feed on the blood of animals, including humans. The tick is brown or black and may be as small as the period at the end of this sentence. Before feeding they can be three to five millimetres in length.

The Lyme disease bacteria can be carried by mice, squirrels, birds and other small animals. It can be passed to humans when ticks feed on infected animals or birds and become infected and then bite people.

The risk of Lyme disease is usually low. It takes more than 24-36 hours for the tick to transmit the disease. Removing the tick as soon as possible may help to stop the spread of Lyme disease into the body.

Use tweezers or your fingers to grasp the body of the tick and remove it gently. After tick removal, wash the area and your hands thoroughly.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Erythema Migrans (EM) rash (may look like a bull's-eye target) appears on 70-80% of infected people from 1 to 30 days after extended contact with a tick (i.e. attached for over 24 hours)
- fever, chills
- headache
- tiredness, fatigue
- stiff neck or soreness all over
- pain or swelling in the joints
- swollen lymph nodes

## What is the treatment?

Early antibiotic treatment prescribed by your doctor is the best way to prevent serious illness. If not treated early, the infection could progress and cause chronic arthritis, cardiac abnormalities, etc.

## How can you prevent Lyme disease?

- Avoid tick-infested areas when possible. Walk on well-travelled paths. Avoid areas with high grass.
- Wear light-coloured, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt in tick-infested areas and tuck pants into socks.

- Cover arms, legs and other exposed areas of the body.
- Wear shoes that cover your entire foot.
- Check frequently for ticks on the skin, especially children.
- Use insect repellent containing DEET or Icaridin when in tick-infested areas.
- Remove ticks from skin as soon as possible.
- See a healthcare provider if symptoms of Lyme disease are noted.
- Use landscaping techniques to reduce the number of ticks around yards.
- Check out the Department of Health and Wellness website at: [novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/lyme.asp](https://novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/lyme.asp)
- Check out the Public Health Agency of Canada website at: [phac-aspc.gc.ca/id-mi/lyme-eng.php](https://phac-aspc.gc.ca/id-mi/lyme-eng.php)