

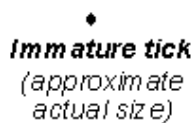


Tick Bites and Disease

What are ticks?

Ticks are tiny bugs which feed on blood. Some are about the size of a sesame seed. Different ticks prefer different types of animals. Sometimes a tick will bite a person instead of biting an animal. While most tick bites do not result in disease, some do.

Ticks live in tall grass and wooded areas. They are easiest to spot on a person 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. They will be full of blood and blue-grey in colour. This is called an "engorged" tick.



Female adult tick
(approximately 10 times actual size)

What should I do if I find a tick on my skin?

If you have found a tick on your skin, you will need to remove it as soon as possible. Check your whole body and clothing. Do not stop when you find one tick. There may be more. Make sure the lighting is good so that you will not miss seeing the ticks. Get someone to help with young children and hard-to-see areas.

If you cannot reach the tick or see it clearly to remove it yourself, get someone else to remove the tick for you, or get your family doctor to remove it.

When to get a doctor to remove the tick

You should go to your doctor to get the tick removed if it has buried itself deep into your skin.

This happens if the tick has been on you for several hours, or even a day or two. When a tick has burrowed deep into your skin, it is very hard to remove the tick without leaving some mouth parts behind, which can cause an infection.

Removing a tick

If you can remove the tick yourself, follow these instructions.

1. Use tweezers to gently get a hold of the tick as close to its mouth as possible. The body of the tick will be above your skin. Don't touch the tick with your hands. Wear latex gloves if possible.
2. Steadily lift the tick straight off the skin. Do not squeeze the tick because this can force its stomach contents into the wound and increase the chance of an infection. Do not jerk, unscrew or twist the tick because this may separate the head from the body. It is very important to make sure that all of the tick, including the mouth parts that are buried in your skin, are removed.
3. Once the tick has been removed, clean the bite area with soap and water. You may also put a small amount of antibiotic ointment on the area. Wash your hands with soap and water.

You **can not** remove a tick by covering it with grease or gasoline, or by holding a match or cigarette against the tick. This does not work! This only increases the chance of you getting an infection.

What to do with the tick once it is removed

1. Put the live tick in a small container with a tight fitting lid, and with a cotton ball dampened with water to keep it alive. Do **not** use rubbing alcohol or any other liquid. Only live ticks can be tested for infection. Put the container in the fridge. It can remain there for up to 8 days, until you speak with your doctor or public health unit to see if the tick should be submitted for testing.
2. Contact your doctor or local health authority for more information. Your doctor or health unit may do an assessment and send the tick to the BC Centre for Disease Control for testing, if required.

How do I avoid getting bitten by a tick?

To protect yourself and your family against tick and insect bites:

1. Walk on cleared trails wherever possible when walking in tall grass or woods.
2. Wear light coloured clothing, tuck your top into your pants, and tuck your pants into your boots or socks.
3. Use an insect repellent containing DEET on your clothes and on all uncovered skin. Reapply as directed on the container.
4. Check clothing and scalp (covered or not) when leaving an area where ticks may live. Check in folds of skin. Have someone help you check young children and hard-to-see areas.
5. Regularly check household pets, which go into tall grass and wooded areas.

What diseases can be spread by ticks?

Several diseases can be passed to humans from tick bites. The most well-known is Lyme disease.

Borrelia burgdorferi, the organism that causes Lyme disease has been found in ticks collected from many areas of British Columbia, and dozens of Lyme Disease cases have been identified in the past 15 years. Many people with Lyme Disease have not travelled outside of the province, and it is likely they contracted the disease in B.C.

Not all ticks carry this bacterium, and there is only a very small chance of them giving it to you. However, because the resulting disease can be serious, it is worth taking steps to avoid being bitten.

Other diseases passed on by ticks include relapsing fever, tularemia, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF), Q fever and anaplasmosis formerly known as Ehrlichiosis. All of these diseases are rare in British Columbia.

Certain ticks may release a toxin that can cause temporary paralysis. This is the reason it is important to remove the whole tick as soon as possible.

What are the symptoms of tick-related diseases?

If you have the following symptoms within days or weeks after being bitten by a tick, report them to your family doctor right away. Tell your doctor when and where a tick bit you.

1. General symptoms of fever, headache, muscle and joint pains, fatigue or weakness of the muscles of the face.
2. Skin rash, especially one that looks like a bull's eye. It may or may not be where the bite was.
3. In some cases paralysis may occur. The paralysis usually starts in the feet and legs and works its way up to the upper body, arms and head. This paralysis usually starts within a few hours to a day or two of the bite.

What is the treatment for tick-related diseases?

There are currently no vaccines licensed in Canada for any diseases passed on by ticks.

Lyme disease and other tick-related diseases can be treated with antibiotics. Early diagnosis and treatment can help prevent complications.



BC Centre for Disease Control
AN AGENCY OF THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY

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