

## **PATIENT HANDOUT – Please feel free to copy this page**

### **Tick bites and what to do**

While you may be concerned after being bitten by a tick, the risk of acquiring an infection is quite low. Unless a tick has attached itself to your body, it does NOT pass along any infection.

If a person is bitten by a deer tick (the type of tick that carries Lyme disease), a healthcare provider will likely do one of following:

- Observe and treat if signs or symptoms of infection develop
- Treat with a preventive antibiotic immediately

Blood testing for Lyme disease will not be done at the time of the tick bite because it takes about two to six weeks after the infection develops (post-tick bite) in order for your healthcare provider to know whether or not you are infected.

If you have been bitten, **carefully** remove the tick (see instructions below) and make note of its appearance, before you seek medical attention.

### **How to remove a tick**

- Do not use a smoldering match or cigarette, nail polish, petroleum jelly (e.g., Vaseline), liquid soap, or kerosene because they may cause the tick to inject bodily fluids into your wound.
- Use fine tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin surface as possible.
- Pull backwards gently but firmly, using an even, steady pressure. Do not jerk or twist.
- Do not squeeze, crush, or puncture the body of the tick, since its bodily fluids may contain infection-causing organisms.
- After removing the tick, wash the skin and your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- If any mouth parts of the tick remain in the skin, these should be left alone; they will be expelled on their own. Attempts to remove these parts may result in significant skin trauma.

### **Signs of Lyme disease**

Even if you (or your children) do not seek immediate medical help, watch the area of the bite for redness that gets larger. This expanding rash is called erythema migrans (EM) and is typical of Lyme disease. Approximately 80 percent of people with Lyme disease develop EM. About 10 to 20 percent of people have several rashes or lesions.

The EM rash is usually a salmon color. Less commonly, the rash can be an intense red and sometimes look like a skin infection. The lesion typically gets larger over a few days or weeks and can grow to be over 20 cm (8 inches) around. As the rash expands, it can become a lighter colour in the centre compared to its edges or the rash can develop into a series of rings or circles making it look like a “bull’s eye.” The rash usually causes no symptoms, although burning or itching has been reported.

In people with early localized Lyme disease, EM occurs within one month of the tick bite, usually within a week. Only one-third of people, however, remember having been bitten by a tick that gave them Lyme disease. The saliva of a tick can cause a short-term (24 to 48 hours) rash that should not be confused with EM. This reaction usually does not expand to be larger than a dime.

### **Prevention**

If you take part in outdoor activities in wooded areas where there are known cases of Lyme disease (i.e., hiking, camping), you should take steps to prevent being bitten.

- Repellents containing DEET (between 20% and 30% such as OFF Deep Woods or Muskol™) or Icaridin (20% such as OFF! Family Care Clean Feel™ spray or towelettes) can be put directly on skin or clothes. The disadvantage: it needs to be re-applied often to work properly.
- Permethrin is a synthetic compound causing nervous system toxicity to ticks and aquatic life, but low toxicity to humans. Either ticks leave the sprayed area immediately or die if they remain in contact with it. With proper treatment (e.g., 30–45 seconds to spray both sides and allowed to dry thoroughly), clothing or bedding can be sprayed and can last for an entire season through several launderings. Great care needs to be exercised, however, as permethrin should not come in contact with the skin or be inhaled. Once dried, it has no odour. It is possible to purchase clothing already impregnated with permethrin.
- Because ticks sit higher up in grasses or shrubs, it is important to stay to the middle of the paths in wooded areas where possible.
- Light coloured clothing allows you see ticks more easily
- Closed-toed shoes, long sleeves, and long pants (tucked into socks) help to avoid tick bites. Duct tape around sleeve bottoms and ankles provides extra protection.
- It is important to check every day for ticks on body, clothing, gear, and pets after outdoor activities and before entering the house. Immediately remove ticks with tweezers. Removing ticks within 24–36 hours usually prevents infection.
- It is a really good idea to take a shower within two hours of being outdoors.

### **Treatment**

Lyme disease can still be treated if antibiotics are not given early enough. Even later symptoms of Lyme disease can be treated effectively with the right antibiotics. For more information, you can go to the Health Canada website and search under Lyme disease.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION — Your healthcare provider is the best source of information for questions and concerns related to your medical problem.