

April 23, 2015

RE: BLACKLEGGED TICKS AND LYME DISEASE

Dear Parent, Guardian or Student:

As temperatures rise and the days become longer, most of us will be spending more time outdoors. Unfortunately, this is also the time of year when we need to be especially careful about blacklegged ticks, which carry the germ that causes Lyme disease.

Blacklegged ticks, sometimes called “deer ticks”, are found across Nova Scotia, including Halifax Regional Municipality, Lunenburg County, Pictou County, Shelburne County, Yarmouth County, and Queens County. The locations are outlined on a map on the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness website at <http://www.novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/lyme.asp>.

May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month – and a reminder that there are some simple things we can all do to prevent Lyme disease:

- Apply insect repellants containing DEET or icaridin to exposed skin and clothing.
- Wear long sleeves shirts and pants and closed shoes, and tuck your pant legs into socks. Wear light-coloured clothing so any ticks show up better.
- Check your skin and scalp for attached ticks. This is important since blacklegged ticks have to stay attached for more than 24-36 hours to cause infection with Lyme disease.
- If you find ticks, remove them as quickly as possible. Here’s how to remove a tick safely:
 - Carefully grasp the tick with tweezers as close to the skin as possible.
 - Gently and slowly pull the tick straight out. Do not jerk, twist or squeeze it.
 - Clean and disinfect the site with soap and water, rubbing alcohol, or hydrogen peroxide to avoid other infections.
 - Dispose of the tick in a sealed plastic bag and put in the garbage.
 - Do NOT try to burn, squeeze or coax a tick’s mouthparts from your skin using other methods.
 - To see how to remove a tick, watch the video at http://www.tickencounter.org/prevention/how_to_remove_a_tick_video
- Also check clothing and pets which can carry ticks into the home.
- Stay in the middle of paths away from grass and shrubs.

Remember to take these precautions if you or your family members spend time in the brush or forests, particularly in those areas of Nova Scotia where blacklegged ticks are common.

For more information, go to the Department of Health and Wellness website at <http://www.novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/lyme.asp> or the Public Health Services website at <http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/public-health> (click on *Get Tick'd Off*).

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Robin Taylor in blue ink.

Robin Taylor, MD, PhD, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

Handwritten signature of Noella Whelan in black ink.

Noella Whelan, BN RN, MN
Manager, Public Health/Protecting Health Unit