

# The Mortar & Pestle

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## Stafford Pharmacy & Home Healthcare

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### SPOTLIGHT: TICKS

Canadian Health officials are warning Canadians that the population of disease-carrying wood ticks is growing. Researchers have found that along with the increasing numbers, ticks are taking up residence in new areas across the country.

#### Why are ticks a concern to humans?

There are many species of ticks and not all of them pose a threat to humans. However, some of them, namely the Deer Tick, Western Black Legged Tick, and the Lone Star Tick are capable of spreading disease to humans. Depending on where they live, anywhere from 1 to 90% of ticks are infected with the bacteria *Borellia burgdorferi*, the bacterium that causes Lyme disease. Ticks carry many other diseases, including **tularemia, tick paralysis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and Colorado Tick Fever.**

Infected ticks spread the harmful bacteria through their saliva to humans when they bite. This bacteria is NOT transmitted from human to human, or from humans to pets. Dogs, however, can contract the bacteria from the infected urine of other dogs.

#### Where are ticks found?

Ticks are commonly found in grass, weeds, forest floors, leaf litter, and bushes.

#### Is there a tick “season”?

Ticks are most commonly a problem for humans and pets from April through September. However, they may be found year round. Ticks are most active when it is -2°C and above.

#### What do ticks look like?

There are many species of disease-carrying ticks and they all look fairly similar. They have 3 or 4 pairs of legs, depending on their stage of development (larval, nymph, adult) and are 1-5mm in size. They can become as large as 2 cm after sucking the blood of their host.

#### How can you prevent being bitten by a tick?

- Avoid bushes and wooded areas with high grasses and walk in the center of trails
- Repel ticks with DEET-containing repellent. Ensure that the repellent contains more than 20% DEET and apply to exposed skin.
- Bathe or shower within 2 hours after coming indoors
- Conduct a **full-body tick check** using a handheld mirror when you have been in tick infested areas. Parents should check children for ticks. Be sure to check under arms, around ears, inside belly buttons, behind knees, between legs, around the waist, and especially in hair.
- Enlist the help of another person if you are not able to do a thorough inspection.
- Examine gear (i.e. backpacks) and pets thoroughly. Tumble clothes in a dryer on high heat for an hour to kill any hiding ticks.



## What should you do if you are bitten by a tick?

Embedded ticks should be removed using fine tip tweezers, grasping the tick firmly and as close to the skin as possible. With a steady motion, pull the tick's body away from the skin. DO NOT use fingers to pull out ticks. DO NOT use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish, or other products. Cleanse the area with an antiseptic and SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IMMEDIATELY.

If you are bitten by an infected tick, failure to seek medical attention may result in the development of Lyme disease.

## LYME DISEASE

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By the year 2020 it is estimated that 80% of Canadians will live in Lyme disease endemic areas. Currently in Canada, there is a growing concern that Lyme disease is **under diagnosed**. There are many reasons for this, some of which include a lack of public awareness, and misdiagnosis by physicians due to non-specific symptoms.

### What are the Symptoms of Lyme disease?

The tick bite is the first sign of Lyme disease; however, fewer than 50% of people diagnosed recall having a tick bite or seeing the trademark "bull's-eye" rash. Early on, many people experience a "flu-like" illness, after which they have not felt well or "normal."

There are other symptoms of Lyme disease, which adds to the difficulty in diagnosis. Common symptoms include:

- RASH: the rash can vary greatly in size and appearance and may be on more than one body part at a time. It may be at the site of the bite or on other parts of the body.
- NERVOUS SYSTEM: muscle twitches, ticks, numbness/tingling, weakness, partial paralysis, dizziness, etc.
- PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: mood swings, irritability, unusual depression, disorientation, memory loss, panic attacks, anxiety, etc.
- MUSCULOSKELETAL: muscle, bone and joint pain and/or stiffness

### How is Lyme disease treated?

If you know you have been bitten by a tick, seek medical attention immediately in order to receive a 6-week course of antibiotic therapy. This will help prevent the development of chronic Lyme disease.

Both the diagnosis and treatment of chronic Lyme disease is highly controversial in Canada. Canadian physicians have no guidelines to follow when testing for and treating the disease. This forces many Canadians to seek diagnosis and treatment across the border. In June of this year, Elizabeth May (MP and Green Party leader) introduced a Private Member's Bill, calling for the development of a Canadian National Strategy for Lyme disease diagnosis and treatment. **For more information on Lyme disease and a complete list of symptoms, visit [www.canlyme.com](http://www.canlyme.com)**

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