

Tick-borne illnesses are on the rise in Ontario because the insects are now able to survive the winter. Although the chances of being bit by a tick in Ontario remain low, there are steps that hikers, campers and other outdoor-enthusiasts can take to prevent being bitten and react if they are. The Ontario Medical Association spoke with Dr. Colin Lee, associate medical officer of health at the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, who said that having fun outdoors and taking tick precautions is all about balance.

### **Be mindful of the clothing you're wearing outdoors**

Your clothing may help prevent ticks from getting onto your skin. Tucking your shirt into your pants and tucking your pants into your socks will prevent ticks from getting onto your skin. Wearing light-colored clothing can also help you spot ticks more easily after spending time outside. After coming back indoors, you can put your clothes in the dryer on high heat for 15 minutes before washing them. This will kill any ticks that might have latched onto your clothing.

### **Search yourself for ticks**

As soon as you return indoors, take a shower so that any ticks on your skin will wash off before they have the chance to bite you. Use a mirror or ask another person to search your body for ticks. Ticks tend to hide in spots such as your hair line, behind your ears, in your underarm and between your toes. You should also look through your pets' fur for potential ticks.

### **Remove ticks on your skin as soon as possible**

If you notice a tick on your skin, remove it as soon as possible because the longer the tick feeds on you, the higher likelihood that an infection will be passed on to you. To [remove](#) the tick, use the tip of tweezers and grasp the tick as close to your skin as possible. Hold the tick firmly, but be careful not to squeeze tightly, because squishing the tick's body could pop it, transferring its potential virus onto you. Once holding the tick with tweezers, pull upwards to remove it. If you find there are some remains on your skin, you can leave it alone; your body will naturally push the rest out. Put the tick in a sealed container and wash your bite with soap and water. If there's a chance that the tick has been on your skin for more than 24 hours, visit a health-care provider.

### **Identify the kind of ticks you've been exposed to**

The website [eTick](#) displays photos of different kinds of ticks so that users can identify any ticks found on their skin. The website also has a service in which users can take a photo of the tick and the website will identify the tick within 24 hours. This is important because you should identify whether you've been bitten by a black-legged tick, the kind that is responsible for most human tick-borne diseases. However, it's important not to panic because not all black-legged ticks are infected with disease; for example, the risk of developing Lyme disease following a tick bite is between one to three per cent.

### **Recognize potential symptoms**

Lyme disease is the most common tick disease in Canada, so it's important to monitor yourself for symptoms for a month after you've been exposed to ticks. One common indicator of the disease is a rash on the tick bite, which will have a diameter greater than five centimetres. Other symptoms include a fever, chills, headache, fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, decreased appetite and joint aches. If notice these symptoms after spending time outside and you're unsure if you have a tick bite, visit your health-care provider.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/video/lyme-disease-properly-remove-tick.html>

<https://www.etic.ca/>