

HALTON REGION PUBLIC HEALTH • Office of the Medical Officer of Health

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TO: Halton Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Emergency Departments, other Healthcare Providers

FROM: Dr. Deepika Lobo, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: May 15, 2024

RE: Increasing risk of tick-borne diseases in Halton

QUICK FACTS

- Active tick surveillance in Halton demonstrates that the blacklegged tick (BLT) populations are expanding, and more ticks are testing positive for *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which is the causative agent of Lyme disease.
- The risk of acquiring Lyme disease in Halton remains low, however, locally acquired cases are trending upwards with twenty-eight confirmed cases in 2023 (up from only eight confirmed cases in 2022). Halton is an established risk area for blacklegged ticks for 2024.
- Diagnosis of Lyme disease is primarily based on clinical symptoms and epidemiological risk factors. Existing serological testing has limited accuracy for diagnosing Lyme disease, particularly in the early stages. For Lyme disease clinical guidance, including treatment information, refer to the [Management of Tick Bites and Investigation of Early Localized Lyme Disease](#).
- BLTs can also transmit other tick-borne diseases such as anaplasmosis, babesiosis, and Powassan virus. Currently, the risk of contracting these diseases remains low in Halton.
- Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) should be [considered](#) for certain patients with a recent tick exposure.
- Although tick-borne diseases like Lyme disease can be avoided, this should be balanced with the known benefits of leading an active outdoor lifestyle.

KEY MESSAGES FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

- Many people infected with tick-borne diseases do not recall being bitten by a tick.
- [Serological testing](#) should only be used to supplement clinical findings, not for diagnosis of early Lyme disease or to monitor treatment response.
- PHO's [Ontario Blacklegged Tick Established Risk Areas 2024](#) provides a provincial picture of where there are known BLT populations and can be used for risk assessment.
- Report any suspected or confirmed cases of Lyme disease and other reportable tick-borne diseases to Halton Public Health by calling 311.
- To learn more about Ontario's new tick-borne diseases and laboratory testing, please [register](#) for the accredited Public Health Ontario Rounds on May 21, 2024.
- Once a tick has been [removed](#), a photo of the tick can be submitted to [etick.ca](#), a free tick identification service to determine if it is a BLT.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Includes information that can be shared with patients on safe tick removal and risk reduction strategies

- Ontario.ca - [Tick-borne diseases](#)
- Halton - [Lyme Disease](#)
- Public Health Ontario – [Anaplasmosis](#) – [Babesiosis](#) – [Powassan virus](#)

Please report all suspected/confirmed cases of [Diseases of Public Health Significance](#) to Public Health immediately by calling 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866.

PLEASE PROVIDE A COPY TO ALL PHYSICIANS IN YOUR OFFICE AND/OR POST IN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS AND PHYSICIAN LOUNGES. IF YOU HAVE ANY ISSUES WITH THIS ATTACHMENT, PLEASE EMAIL DOCTORS@HALTON.CA.