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Ticks are back! It's time to take precautions.

An early start to warm spring weather means many of us are getting out and enjoying the great outdoors. The warm weather also brings out ticks, small bugs that bite and feed on the blood of humans and animals and can sometimes transmit disease. Ticks are most often found in tall grass and wooded areas. Fortunately, there are precautions people can take to prevent illnesses that may be transmitted from tick bites.

“Covering up before you head outdoors and checking for ticks when returning from a walk, hike, or bike ride are simple things that go a long way to prevent tick bites,” said Dr. Karin Goodison, Public Health Physician with Interior Health. “Most tick bites do not cause illness; however, any bite from a tick or other insect should be cleaned with soap and water because infection can occur whenever there is a break in the skin.”

The most common tick species in the Interior Health region is the Wood Tick (*Dermacentor andersoni*), species which does not carry the Lyme disease bacteria. The Wood Tick can carry other diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever, although it is rare. Lyme disease-carrying ticks (*Ixodes pacificus*) are more common in the coastal areas of B.C. Ticks also have toxins that can cause temporary muscle weakness and paralysis if they are attached for several days, especially in children or seniors, but the symptoms fade once the tick is removed from the skin. The signs of many tick-borne infections can be quite similar and include fever, headache, muscle pain, and rash.

“Lyme disease-carrying ticks are less common in the Interior of B.C. than on the coast; however, our residents do travel around the province, so it's important they are aware of the signs of Lyme disease,” said Dr. Goodison. “Approximately 70-80 per cent of people newly infected with Lyme disease will develop a skin rash that looks like a “bulls eye” target and often expands from the site of the tick bite. The rash may be accompanied by fever, headache, and aches or pains in muscles and joints. Individuals who experience this rash should see a doctor as soon as possible.”

One of the most important ways to reduce the risk of tick illnesses is to do a skin check on yourself, your children, and your pets after being outdoors. Other precautions include:

- Walking on cleared trails when in tall grass or wooded areas.
- Wearing a hat, long sleeves, pants, and light-coloured clothing.
- Tucking pant legs into socks or boots.
- Applying insect repellent containing DEET on uncovered skin.
- Carefully checking clothing and scalp (covered or not) when leaving an area where ticks may live.

To reduce ticks from entering your home and yard, try these steps:

- Keep your lawn short and remove any fallen leaves and weeds.

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- Keep a buffer area such as wood-chip or gravel border between your lawn and wooded areas or stone walls. Any play equipment or play zones should be kept away from wooded areas.
 - Trim tree branches to allow more sunlight in your yard.
 - Keep wood piles and bird feeders away from the house.
 - Widen and maintain trails on your property.

If you find a tick on yourself, a family member, or pet, wear gloves and gently remove it. Be careful not to crush the tick as this could cause it to inject its stomach contents into your skin. If you find a tick, check very carefully for others. Other tips to remove ticks safely include:

- Use needle-nose tweezers to gently grasp the tick close to the skin.
- Without squeezing, pull the tick straight out.
- After removal, clean the area with soap and water.

If you have concerns or need assistance removing a tick, please contact your family doctor or visit a walk-in medical clinic.

More information is available at:

HealthLink BC file: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile01.stm>

BCCDC Lyme Disease information: http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/a-z/_l/LymeDisease/default.htm