

August 31, 2015

**Re: Lyme Disease in Newfoundland and Labrador**

Dear Health Professional,

We are writing to update you on Lyme disease in Newfoundland and Labrador and to bring your attention to communication activities we have planned. As Lyme disease is an emerging disease in Canada, with endemic areas in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, we feel it important that you have up-to-date information on Lyme disease and the implications for residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Lyme disease is a notifiable disease under the Newfoundland and Labrador *Communicable Disease Act* and all cases diagnosed clinically or with laboratory confirmation must be reported to the Chief Medical Officer of Health. For more information about notifiable diseases, visit the website: <http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/cdc.html#basic>

To better understand the distribution of blacklegged ticks (the vector for Lyme disease) across the province, the Animal Health Division of the Forestry and Agrifoods Agency, in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), and Memorial University, conducts ongoing passive and active surveillance. There are currently no areas of Newfoundland and Labrador that are endemic for Lyme disease. It is thought that there are also no established populations of blacklegged ticks in the province but that rather, those ticks that are found are transient and likely arrive to the province on migratory birds. Surveillance activities have shown that of the low numbers of ticks discovered, approximately 20% are infected with *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the species of bacterium that causes Lyme disease. As such, the risk of exposure to Lyme disease in Newfoundland and Labrador remains low. For more information about provincial surveillance activities, visit <http://www.faa.gov.nl.ca/agrifoods/animals/health/lymedisease.html>

As the risk to the majority of Newfoundland and Labrador residents remains low, the Department of Health and Community Services is targeting awareness and education information to those groups who are at an increased risk of exposure to ticks and Lyme disease due to spending time outdoors. These include:

- Tourists
  - o Marine Atlantic
- Recreation groups and organizations that may reach :
  - o Campers;
  - o Hunters/fishers;
  - o Birders;
  - o Golfers;
  - o Hikers;
  - o Bikers; and
  - o Outfitters;
- Outdoor occupations (e.g. forestry technicians, landscapers, land surveyors, wildlife officers, etc.):

- Occupational health and safety advisors;
- Parks administration;
- Recreation programming leaders; and
- Property maintenance workers.

The Department of Health and Community Services is disseminating important Lyme disease awareness and education information via email and website to the above identified community groups. The information will include risk areas of Lyme disease in Canada, messaging on tick bite prevention, and information to help people recognize the signs and symptoms of Lyme disease. The key messages included in the correspondence will be:

- While there are currently no areas in Newfoundland and Labrador identified as high risk for exposure to Lyme disease, it is still possible to be exposed.
  - The risk of contracting Lyme disease increases in rural, forested, woodland environments compared to urban areas.
  - The risk of contracting Lyme disease increases when travelling in parts of Canada, the United States, and internationally, where Lyme disease is endemic.
- When you are in high risk areas or are engaging in outdoor activities, prevent tick bites by:
  - Wearing appropriate clothing such as closed-toe shoes, long pants, and long sleeves. Tuck your pants into your socks so ticks can't crawl up your legs. Wearing light coloured clothing make ticks easier to spot.
  - Applying an insect repellent containing DEET or Icaridin to exposed skin and to clothes. Always follow the label directions when applying repellent.

Prevent potential transmission of Lyme disease from tick bites by:

- Completing a thorough tick check on you, your children, and your pets when returning from outdoor activity, especially in high risk areas for Lyme disease. Immature ticks can be very small, so be sure to check carefully.
- Removing any ticks you find attached to you, your child, or your pet promptly. Ticks must be attached for at least 24 hours to transmit the bacteria. Information about proper technique for removing ticks can be found at

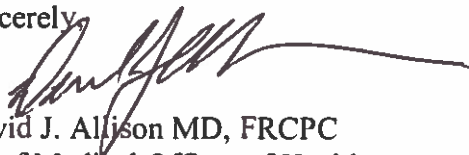
<http://www.faa.gov.nl.ca/agrifoods/animals/health/lymedisease.html>

If you develop signs and symptoms of Lyme disease, especially if you've been visiting a province with known Lyme disease areas, see your family doctor. Information on the signs and symptoms of Lyme disease can be found at

[http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/lyme\\_disease.pdf](http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/lyme_disease.pdf)

For your information, please see the attached resources. If you have any additional questions regarding Lyme disease, please contact your local Regional Health Authority or call the Healthline at 811.

Sincerely,



David J. Allison MD, FRCPC  
 Chief Medical Officer of Health  
 Department of Health and Community Services  
 Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

## Protection from Lyme Disease

**Lyme disease** is an emerging disease in Canada that is caused by the bite of an infected blacklegged tick. These small ticks are found in Canada, including on the island portion of Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as in the United States and internationally. The preferred habitat for these ticks is tall grass, brush, and forested areas.

Currently there are no areas in Newfoundland and Labrador that are believed to have permanent populations of blacklegged ticks. However, blacklegged ticks, including some infected with Lyme disease, are found each year around the province. These ticks likely arrive on migratory birds. While the risk of Lyme disease in Newfoundland and Labrador is considered low, residents are encouraged to take preventive measures to protect themselves from tick bites.

### Those who are most at risk for exposure to ticks and Lyme disease include:

- Travelers to known Lyme disease risk areas
- Outdoor enthusiasts (e.g. campers, hikers, hunters, fishers)
- Persons with outdoor occupations
- Families living or playing in areas with suitable habitat for blacklegged ticks
- Pets

### To protect yourself from tick and insect bites:

- Use an insect repellent such as DEET or Icaridin (always read product label directions before applying)
- Cover as much of your skin as possible, tuck pants legs into boots or socks
- Wear light-colored clothing to be able to spot ticks on your clothes more easily
- Walk on well-travelled trails wherever possible to avoid grass, brush, or shrubs
- Check yourself, your family and pets after being in an area where ticks may be present

### Websites for more information:

How to remove a tick: <http://www.faa.gov.nl.ca/agrifoods/animals/health/ticks/removeticks.html>

Lyme disease in humans: [http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/infectioncontrol/lyme\\_disease.pdf](http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/infectioncontrol/lyme_disease.pdf)

Ticks and Lyme disease in NL, please visit:

Ticks and Lyme disease in NL: <http://www.faa.gov.nl.ca/agrifoods/animals/health/lymedisease.html>

### Websites for healthcare professionals:

Please see the Provincial Disease Control Manual for more information about Lyme disease:

[http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publications/diseasecontrol/s6\\_vectorborne\\_and\\_other\\_zoonotic\\_diseases.pdf](http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publications/diseasecontrol/s6_vectorborne_and_other_zoonotic_diseases.pdf)

Public Health Laboratory website <http://publichealthlab.ca/service/lyme-disease-borrelia-burgdorferi/>