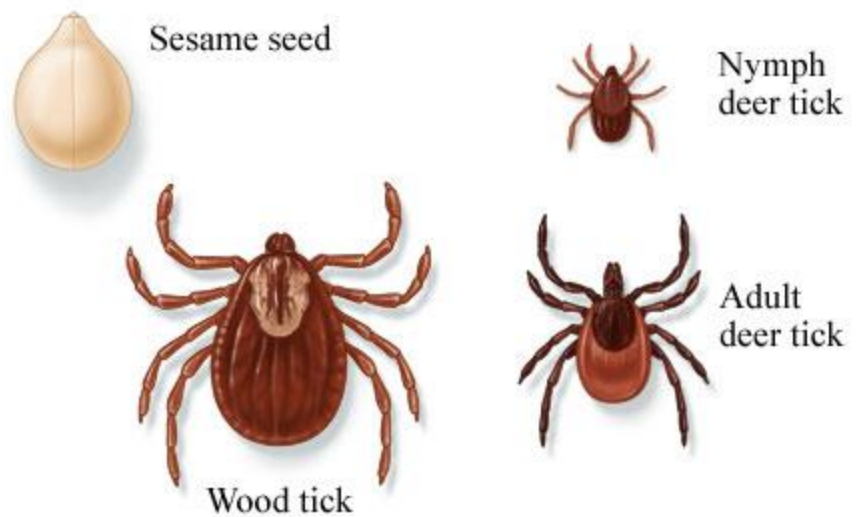


Ticks in the Park

Tick season is upon us. Fear of Lyme disease often keeps us away from spring hiking. Perhaps this is a good time to look at some facts about ticks and think about how to both avoid ticks and how to deal with them once one has hitchhiked unbidden to our skin.

Ticks really aren't that scary. They don't fly, they do not leap upon you from nearby bushes, they just creep onto you from the grass if you brush by them. They crawl up you to find a nice bit of exposed skin so they can feed on your blood. But they are slow and can be discovered once you get home and make a quick body check for them.



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According to the British Columbia Medical Journal, the wood tick, most common in the interior,

does not carry Lyme disease. Lyme disease carrying ticks, *Ixodes Pacificus*, are more common in coastal areas. They do not now exist north of 51 degrees latitude, but can live in the valley bottoms of the Okanagan. However the common wood tick can carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever. This toxin can cause temporary muscle weakness or paralysis, but symptoms subside once the tick is removed.

In 2011, a two year testing of ticks and deer mice (their carriers), in the Okanagan, found that antibodies for *B. burgdorferi* (Lyme disease) were all found to be negative.

According to this study it was concluded that, "There is no evidence to support an epidemic of Lyme disease in BC. The primary vector, *I. pacificus*, is found in populous areas in consistently low numbers, and rates of infection in the tick population remain less than 1%. Human case rates in BC are less than 0.5 per 100 000."

However, if you do find a tick nestled into your skin, take some tweezers and gently pull the little devil out straight and slowly by the head – that's the part penetrating your body. If a couple of days later you observe a bulls eye red circle on your skin, don't ignore it. There is a complicated 2 step process to diagnose Lyme disease but it can be detected and treated.

Best to take precautions and follow simple procedures if you do detect a tick on you after a lovely hike on the trails of the Okanagan. Wear light colour clothing that covers most of your

skin and tuck those pant legs into your socks. It may look dorky, but you might find others with you following suit. Wearing an insect repellent with Deet is recommended, but my experience is that a tick will walk right over Deet covered skin. The best bet is when you get home, shake out your boots outside, take off all your clothes in the bathroom and shake them out. Any little ticks that might fall out can be flushed down the toilet. Alternatively, you can put them in a sealed jar and take them into your doctor if a telltale bullseye appears. Then, have a shower, get a friend or partner to do a quick tick check of your hair and you can be pretty confident all is well. Don't let the little insects deter you from getting out in nature.

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“Lyme Disease in British Columbia: Are we really missing an epidemic?”