

Brush Up on Tick Bites and Preventing Lyme Disease

Top Takeaways

- Point to product labels on insect repellents to ensure they protect against ticks.
- Listen for patients reporting a tick bite and gather key details for the pharmacist.
- Watch doxycycline orders closely, especially days' supply and alerts related to age or pregnancy.

People commonly ask about tick bites and Lyme disease.

How can tick bites be prevented? People should wear protective clothing (long sleeves, etc) and use tick repellent (DEET, etc).

Point to product labels to ensure the repellent covers ticks.

People should also check for ticks on themselves and their pets after being outdoors in wooded, brushy, or grassy areas.

How should ticks be removed? Expect your pharmacist to advise using fine-point tweezers to grab the tick close to the skin and pull it straight out...and cleaning the bite with soap and water after removal.

Don't be surprised if patients are also told to take a picture of the tick...or save it in a sealed bag. Websites, such as eTick or TickEncounter, can help identify the species and guide next steps.

For example, only blacklegged ticks are at risk of carrying *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the bacteria that cause Lyme disease.

What are symptoms of Lyme disease? Stay alert for patients reporting a red, ring-like rash (with or without a bull's-eye)...or feeling like they have the flu (fever, muscle aches, headache, etc) after a tick bite.

A patient may be referred to their prescriber for a treatment course of antibiotics, if needed. But the risk of developing Lyme disease after a bite from an infected tick is low...between 1% to 3%.

If needed, gather key details for the pharmacist...including when the bite occurred, when the tick was removed, and where the patient was.

Who should get antibiotics? Patients may get one dose of doxycycline to PREVENT infection...if a blacklegged tick in a high-risk area (Halifax, Ottawa, Victoria, etc) has been attached for more than 24 hours. This dose should be given within 72 hours of tick removal.

Alert your pharmacist to computer warnings. Doxycycline may prompt an age alert in kids under 8...due to concern about tooth staining. But the short courses for early Lyme don't seem to be an issue.

See our resource, *Treatment of Lyme Disease*, to review antibiotic options for treatment, including late disease and complications (arthritis, etc).

Key References:

- Health Canada. Lyme disease: For health professionals. June 30, 2025. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/lyme-disease/health-professionals-lyme-disease.html> (Accessed May 10, 2026).
- Onyett H; Canadian Paediatric Society, Infectious Diseases and Immunization Committee. Lyme disease in Canada: Focus on children. *Paediatr Child Health*. 2014 Aug;19(7):379-88.
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