

# Tick trouble: Expect to see more ticks, says York University expert

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Black-legged deer tick. (Fotolia.com)

## Sheri Darlison has been running in Malden Park for 10 years and never saw a tick.

Two on her head this week including one that bit her has the Belle River runner wondering if it's going to be a bad summer for ticks.

"It definitely made me very nervous."

On Tuesday night after an hour-long run she found one tick in her hair. In the morning she found another one latched on her forehead.

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Darlison doesn't think it's a deer tick associated with Lyme disease and doesn't have a bull's-eye mark around the bite that is associated with the bacterial infection. Other runners said they had ticks after she posted her tick trouble on Facebook to warn other runners. She may now avoid running in the wooded areas or near long grass.

Her tick likely isn't a deer tick, also called a black-legged tick, since the only local area that is confirmed to have all the stages of the life cycle of the blacklegged tick is Point Pelee National Park.

Dr. Wajid Ahmed, associate medical officer of health at the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, said it's too early to tell what the tick season will bring.

"We are doing the surveillance," Ahmed said Thursday.

Earlier this week the health unit collected ticks at Ojibway and sent them to a lab to check for any sign of Lyme disease. It will take two to four weeks for results.

Ahmed is not hearing about an increase in people dropping off ticks to be analyzed. The health unit only takes ticks that people find on their body (not ticks on their dog) and it is only concerned with black-legged or deer ticks since they can pass on Lyme disease.

Don't assume the black-legged tick is only in Point Pelee, said Jianhong Wu, a York University professor and director of the York

Institute for Health Research who lead a team that produced the first national map for the black-legged tick population.

Windsor-Essex is a hotspot on the map. While the map predicts the tick population can double or triple in other areas of Ontario, Windsor-Essex is in a red zone which means the blacklegged tick population can more than quadruple every two years, Wu said. The tick's life cycle takes two years.

Wu said that population explosion could be happening now.

"They should expect to see more ticks," Wu said Friday of Windsor-Essex residents.

Blacklegged ticks can be carried to the region by migrating birds, southwestern Ontario is already suitable habitat and the reproduction rate is increasing, he explained.

There is a time lag between seeing more blacklegged ticks and the spread of Lyme disease. Canada needs to act during that delay to have the Lyme disease risk mapped, to increase education and fund research to improve Lyme disease diagnosis and treatment, Wu said.

"This delay, as short as two to three years, is short enough that Canada needs to wake up and get ready," Wu said.

Tick sightings have increased in the last decade but not particularly this year, said Ojibway Nature Centre naturalist Tom Preney. Ticks at Malden Park usually turn out to be an American dog tick, also called a wood tick. It is a larger than a blacklegged tick and is not associated with Lyme disease.

Take tick precautions:

The health unit advises avoiding tall grass and sticking to the centre of paths, wearing long sleeves and pants, tucking pants in your socks, showering after being outside to wash off ticks, using insect repellent with at least 20 per cent DEET, and checking yourself and your pets once inside.

See your doctor if you have concerns about a bite. To get Lyme disease, you have to be bitten by a black-legged tick that has Lyme disease and was attached on your skin for at least 24 hours to transfer the bacteria.

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