



Lyme disease – cause and prevention

CoP 23

What this is about:	Ensuring all those working in areas where disease carrying ticks may be present are aware of the risk of Lyme disease and how to prevent it.
Who should read this:	All Research staff and Managers, Site Managers and Wardens, Visitor Centre Managers, Reserve Managers, Area Managers, Field Teachers, Conservation staff, Volunteer & Farmer Alliance workers, those managing or supervising Volunteers, Surveyors and other field workers.
Contact Point:	Health, Safety and Environment Advisor
Content:	<p>Summary of changes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ticks and Lyme disease 2. Precautions 3. Tick removal 4. When to seek medical advice+ 5. Further information 6. Summary record keeping requirements
Summary:	<p>NB bold, non-italicised text highlights required actions</p> <p>If you walk through rough vegetation especially between May and October:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for ticks regularly • Safely remove any attached ticks • Seek medical advice should any symptoms develop <p>If a visitor asks for help with a tick, offer the use of the tick removing tool and an antiseptic wipe.</p>

Summary of changes

This CoP is revision number 4, <i>May 2020</i>	Updating revision number 3, <i>2013</i>
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Section	Paragraph	Description of change(s)	Major or minor
3	3	Added that removal tools should be cleaned after use	Minor
3	3	Added that where the risk of ticks has been identified, sites/departments must make tick removal tools available to their workers.	Minor

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1 Ticks and Lyme disease

Ticks are parasitic arachnids found in vegetation across woodland, heath and moorland throughout the UK and are typically 3-5mm in length. Ticks pass from vegetation to clothing when a host brushes past and then find their way underneath clothing to find a suitable place on the body to feed on the blood of the host.

Ticks may carry several diseases capable of being transmitted to humans with Lyme disease (Lyme borreliosis) being the most common. Although seldom fatal, Lyme disease is a debilitating condition that can remain in the body for many years, affecting the nervous system and occasionally even leading to chronic arthritis and heart conditions. The Lyme disease infection cannot be passed from person to person and is still very rare, though by no means unknown, and the RSPB has had 9 confirmed cases in staff in the past 15 years.

In 2019 tick-borne encephalitis (TBE), which may causes flu like symptoms and attack the central nervous system, was detected in the UK for the first time. The virus has been detected in a small number of ticks in Thetford Forest and an area between Hampshire and Dorset. Public Health England and the National Institute for Health Research are investigating the risks to public health.

Ticks are closely associated with sheep and deer but may be present in gardens and parks in the countryside and urban areas.



2 Precautions

Ticks are most active in late spring, early summer and in early autumn. If you work outside, especially during these months, consider taking the following precautions:

- **Keep to well defined paths where possible and avoid brushing against vegetation**
- **Wear close-weave long trousers and long-sleeved shirts**
- **Keep cuffs fastened and trousers tucked into socks (light-coloured clothing make spotting ticks easier) and spray with insect repellent**
- **Wear footwear that minimises opportunities for ticks to access bare skin such as boots with gaiters or wellingtons**
- **Treat vulnerable areas of clothing with tick repellent e.g. around waist band and leg opening of trousers**
- **Protect bare skin on arms and legs with insect repellent: DEET or permethrin can protect against ticks for several hours.**

Managing vegetation in visitor areas will reduce the risk of contact with ticks and the advice as above should be made available to participants on RSPB organised guided walks. **Check for ticks regularly when out in tall vegetation between May and October. Check in concealed skin areas including armpits, groins, backs of knees and waist.**

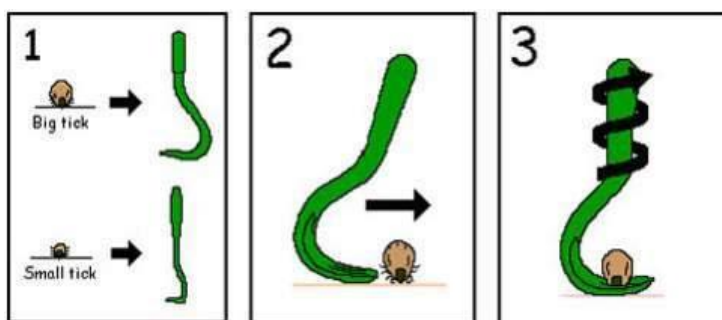
It is important to remove ticks as soon as possible – in the unlikely event that a tick is infected the chances of contracting a tick-borne disease is reduced if the tick is removed as soon as it is discovered.

3 Tick removal

If a visitor reports an attached tick and asks for help, provide information and the tick removing tool for their use, along with the instructions.

Do not use Vaseline, nail varnish, cigarette ends or any of the other ‘top tips’ for removing or otherwise killing the tick – they are liable to leave bits behind for infection. When a tick dies, the ‘throat’ relaxes and allows the infected material to flow into the host. Independent research suggests the best tool is the [O’Tom Tick Twister](#) although fine tipped tweezers may also be used. You can also find more information on Tick removal on the [Lyme Disease UK](#) website.

To remove a tick with a tick twister, take a firm grip with a specialist tool as shown. Grip as close to the skin as possible, gently pull, and twist upwards without squeezing the tick until it lets go. Take time, there is no rush or panic. Once the tick has been removed, clean the bite area with antiseptic wipes as soon as possible, and clean the tool with hot, soapy water immediately after use. **Where the risk of ticks has been identified, sites/departments must make tick removal tools available to their workers.**



4 When to seek medical advice

Symptoms of Lyme disease can be difficult to diagnose and may overlap with those of many other diseases. They may show a few days to several weeks after the bite, and include an expanding red or pink rash around the bite area (though this is not always present). **If symptoms resemble influenza with swollen glands near the site, tiredness and aching joints and muscles, consult a GP or local hospital straight away.**

Recent information suggests that ticks only need to be attached to the body for few hours to transmit the disease. However, even if someone comes into contact with ticks, it should be possible to detect and remove them before any harm is done.

If part of the tick breaks off, or if there is concern any part of it may be left in the skin, the affected person must consult a doctor immediately. If possible the tick should be taken along, folded in sticky tape, so that it can be sent for analysis. If anyone has the symptoms outlined and thinks they have been bitten by an infected tick, they should seek medical advice straight away, and indicate that they are concerned about the risk of Lyme disease. Early treatment with antibiotics will normally prevent the illness developing any further.

All cases of diagnosed tick-borne disease, presumed or known to have been contracted through work, must be reported via the RSPB intranet accident and incident reporting system (Prime).



5 Further information

Further information on Lyme disease and ticks can be obtained from [NHS Direct](#) and [Public Health England](#), [The National Institute for Healthcare Excellence \(NICE\)](#), from the charity [Lyme Disease Action](#) or from [Lyme Disease UK](#). All have a range of free literature on the subject which is occasionally conflicting in minor ways, but in general gives sound advice on tick and disease prevention.

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6 Summary record keeping requirement

What	Retention period	Format	Other info
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A