

LOCHABER TICK TALKS INFORMATION SHEET

Winter in Lochaber is over and we all look forward to summer and getting into the countryside and gardens.

The midges are a nuisance which we all curse. The midges don't leave any lasting effects on our bodies but up to 10% of summer ticks can cause lyme disease unless we look for ticks and remove them properly.

Lyme disease is easily prevented and treated, with some common sense!

Q. What if the problem with ticks in Scotland?

A. The undergrowth in the countryside, from spring until autumn, is covered in tiny ticks which live on deer, rodents and ground nesting birds. Up to 10% of ticks may carry bacteria in the stomach of the tick which is transferred to people and animals when the tick attaches itself and feeds off our blood. If the tick is removed quickly and correctly, there is no risk to our health, but there is a risk of developing lyme disease if this is not done properly. March to October are the at risk months in Scotland for ticks.

Q. Does Lochaber have a particular problem with ticks or lyme disease?

A. No. Lochaber is no worse for ticks than any other part of Scotland. The ticks are also a problem in England in areas such as the new forest. They are also a problem throughout the whole of Northern Europe.

Q. How can I stop getting tick bites?

A. Stick to paths to avoid walking through undergrowth with your legs exposed. Wear long trousers and tuck them into your socks. Be extra vigilant if you are wearing shorts and sitting on the ground.

The ticks like groins, behind knees and armpits where you may not see them easily. You may need to get someone else to check your body for ticks!

Q. What do the ticks look like?

A. Many people think of ticks as being quite big but this is because they are used to seeing ballon-like ticks on a dog or cat but they are in fact very small. Unfed, the largest tick, is a female who is about the size of a sesame seed (3mm) and is the same oval and flat shape. After she has fed, she swells up, to many times her original size (approx 11mm). Male ticks are a bit smaller and are about 2.5mm. Nymph ticks are even smaller -pinhead or poppy seed size (1.5mm) Newly hatched ticks (larvae) are the smallest and can be smaller than a poppy seed (approx 0.5mm) and in fact to the naked eye the larvae look like specks of soot.

Q. What should I do if I find a tick on myself or a child?

A. Don't panic! Wait till you get home and calmly remove the tick with a tick removal tool. Don't attempt to remove it with your fingers. Tweezers are ok if you get the base of the tick but the special tools are much better. Don't use Vaseline, cigarettes or alcohol. Using fingers or tweezers risk squeezing the tick and actually injecting the lyme disease bacteria into your blood. A tick removal device is designed to get underneath the tick and lift it off safely.

Q. What are tick removal devices and where do I get one?

A. One type looks like a clear plastic credit card with a small magnifying glass. The other type is a small plastic lever which looks a little bit like a claw hammer to remove nails. They both cost about £5 and work well. It is a good idea to have one in your first aid kit at home or in your rucksack.

Q. Who should stock tick removal devices?

A. Ideally all Lochaber outdoor shops. Pharmacies and tourism businesses should display tick removal devices prominently from spring to autumn

Q. What is lyme disease?

A. The bacteria transfers itself from the tick to a human host and causes a red skin rash. Simple antibiotic treatment cures this early stage easily. If the rash goes unnoticed the bacteria can cause joint pains or nerve problems which require stronger antibiotics to cure.

Q. What does the rash look like?

A. If you develop a rash after a tick bite, make an appointment with your GP within a week. The red rash from the tick bite spreads, sometimes like a target pattern to a red rash over a week. It may spread across a whole thigh and become more faded over 4-6 weeks then disappear.

Q. Is this a new problem?

A. We think lyme disease has been around for hundreds of years but there has been a definite increase over the past 5-10 years. There are many theories on why this might be so but no reliable method of prediction "lyme disease hot spots" as it seems to vary from year to year between locations and within locations.

Q. Will this not frighten off the tourists?

A. No! This is Lochaber as the outdoor capital leading the way with responsible use of the countryside. Informed tourists expect a knowledgeable tourist economy to provide advice and help.

Q. Is it risky going into the countryside now?

A. There are far more health benefits from all of us going into and enjoying the countryside than any slight risk of tick bites. If we deal with the ticks confidently and knowledgeably, ticks will be a 'non-problem'!

Q. Where can I get more information?

A. <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lyme-disease/pages/symptoms.aspx>

Or

<http://www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk/>

Q. What is happening locally?

A. A group of local people who enjoy being outdoors in Lochaber, have got together to raise awareness of ticks amongst local people, visitors, employers and businesses in Lochaber. They have a google group to share information called 'Lochaber tick talks'. If you wish to join please email james.douglas2@nhs.net