

## FAQ For Partners 2023: Preventing Tick Bites and Lyme Disease

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Lyme disease is a growing health risk for residents and visitors of the Simcoe Muskoka region. Lyme disease is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected blacklegged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*). Climate change is driving the rapid expansion of blacklegged ticks across Simcoe Muskoka. Blacklegged ticks are present throughout Simcoe Muskoka and locally acquired blacklegged ticks have tested positive for the bacteria that causes Lyme disease. Although Lyme disease is preventable, human cases have increased in recent years in Simcoe Muskoka. The best way to prevent infection is to reduce exposure to ticks and by promptly removing a tick from the body. If left untreated Lyme disease can lead to long lasting illnesses including heart disease and arthritis. Activities that increase understanding of ticks, Lyme disease, associated risks and protective measures are necessary to encourage the uptake of protective behaviours to prevent tick-bites and disease transmission.

This FAQ is intended for Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) municipal and community partners and provides general information about ticks and Lyme disease. These key messages can inform staff and be used in communication with the public. It also provides information on the Tick Zone signs. We value your partnership on initiatives to increase awareness.

### ***What is SMDHU's Role Re: Ticks and Lyme disease?***

SMDHU's role is to reduce the risk of vector-borne diseases like Lyme disease through surveillance of ticks and other vectors of public health concern and work to raise public awareness. Strategies to prevent Lyme disease also serve as climate-health adaptation measures and help communities adapt to and reduce the expanding health risks of Lyme disease occurring in the context of climate change. SMDHU actions fulfill [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) requirements in the areas of infectious disease, healthy environments, and climate change and align with SMDHU's Climate Change Theory of Change.

### ***What Lyme disease initiatives will SMDHU deploy in 2023?***

- **Public awareness and communication** activities aim to increase awareness and knowledge regarding ticks, Lyme disease and preventative strategies (e.g., Tick Zone Signs, Tick-Talk eLearning Video, Social Media, Webpage content etc.)
- **Active surveillance** (tick dragging) will be conducted in the Spring and Fall in Simcoe and Muskoka. Confirmed locations include the City of Barrie, Township of Ramara and Huntsville.
- **Continued promotion of [etick.ca](http://etick.ca)** for tick identification and **passive surveillance**.

### **Tick Zones and Tick-Talk**

In 2021, SMDHU developed several new evidence-informed health promotion activities including *Tick Zone signs* (see appendix 1) and a short eLearning video entitled *Tick-Talk: Full Body Tick-Check*. An evaluation of the 2021 activities identified the project was carried out as planned, reached the target audience, and satisfied partners who received tick-zone signs. Additional learnings from the evaluation will be integrated into future activities. In 2023 SMDHU will continue to work with partners (you) to distribute these resources.

### ***What is the function of the Tick Zone signs?***

The Tick Zone signs aim to increase people's awareness of places where ticks may be active (tick zones), the risk of tick-bites and to encourage/remind the public to use health protective measures to prevent tick-bites and disease transmission. The health protective behaviours highlighted on the sign target forest and woodland trail users. The accompanying QR code directs users to the SMDHU ticks and Lyme disease webpage ([www.smdhu.org/lyme](http://www.smdhu.org/lyme)), where the eLearning video on tick-checking is available in French and English, alongside other useful information about ticks and Lyme disease.

### ***My organization has received physical copies of Tick Zone signs, where do we put them?***

Tick Zone signs are designed to be posted at entrances of forested trails where people commonly walk, hike and/or bike. These locations are being targeted because they serve as tick zones (tick-habitats, where ticks are likely to be active). Further there is an observed increase in the use of these trails since the COVID-19 pandemic.

With pre-made holes, the signs can be hung easily at trail entrances.

### ***How do you know the signs are working?***

SMDHU can track when and how many times the QR Code on the Tick Zone signs are scanned. Based on this information, we can see that the signs are being observed, and people are engaging with the QR Code that leads them to more information about ticks and Lyme disease. We can also see that the signs are reaching the public during months of greatest risk. We continue to see an uptake of engagement with the signs.



### ***Can my organization get more signs?***

In 2023, SMDHU is prioritizing distribution of Tick Zone signs to municipal partners who did not receive signs in the 2021/2022 distribution. A limited number of signs are available. In addition to the physical signs, we can also provide a PDF version of the sign (available in English and French) for your organization to print additional signs or for integration into existing signs (e.g., park information boards)..

If your organization wishes to print additional signs, please contact the healthy environments and vector-borne disease program 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520, ext. 8523 Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

### ***What does my organization do after posting the signs?***

There is not much to do once the signs are posted. To help us monitor and maintain signs please complete the following:

- Complete [this short survey](#). The survey should take 5 minutes to complete. The survey will help us identify where the signs are posted. We will be able to add them to our map (See the current map in Appendix 2)
- Let SMDHU know if the signs deteriorate as they age.

We also encourage you to direct the public to SMDHU resources for more information.

If you have any questions, please contact the healthy environments and vector-borne disease program 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520, ext. 8523, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

### **eLearning Video: Tick-Talk – Full Body Tick-Check**

#### ***What is the focus of the eLearning video?***

The video intends to increase public knowledge that tick-checking is a simple and effective prevention measure. It equips individuals with the knowledge to perform a comprehensive tick-check. A full body tick-check helps individuals find and remove a tick within 24 hours of a bite before the bacteria causing Lyme disease would be transmitted. This simple step eliminates the risk of Lyme disease from that tick bite..

#### ***How can the eLearning video be accessed?***

The eLearning video's (French and English) are available on [SMDHU's webpage](http://smdhu.org/ticks) at [smdhu.org/ticks](http://smdhu.org/ticks) and on the [SMDHU YouTube](#) channel. The physical signs include a QR code, directing people to SMDHU's webpage where the videos are located.

Your organization is encouraged to promote these videos on your webpages, social media etc.

### **Additional Awareness and Communication Activities**

#### ***Are there other awareness and communication resources available that our organization can use?***

SMDHU is progressively working to increase awareness of ticks, Lyme disease and health protective behaviours with evidence-informed strategies. We will continue to develop or adapt activities as resources and capacity become available.

SMDHU materials for the public.

- [www.smdhu.org/lyme](http://www.smdhu.org/lyme)
  - The webpage contains a range of information on ticks (e.g., where they are, what they look like – including real images), Lyme disease (e.g., symptoms), prevention strategies, and what to do if you find a tick.
- Social Media posts

To reduce duplication of effort, SMDHU also promotes the Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) [Awareness Resources](#) including:

- Lyme disease: How to Properly Remove a Tick ([Video](#))
- Lyme disease: How to Reduce Ticks Around Your Home ([Video](#))
- How to Check for and Remove Tick ([Wallet Card](#))
- Top 10 Tick Hiding Spots on Your Body ([Poster](#))
- Enjoy the Outdoors Without a Tick ([Pamphlet](#); [Poster](#))

Several of PHAC's resources are available in Multiple Languages (E.g., Ojibwe, Mohawk, French, Cantonese, Italian etc.)

#### ***Can my organization use these?***

SMDHU encourages our partners to use and promote SMDHU resources. For example, your organization can re-post SMDHU social media messages to your networks. You can also share or link to SMDHU webpage. You can also order PHAC resources or print them following their [ownership and usage process](#).

### ***Are there opportunities to inform future materials?***

SMDHU works closely with our partners to increase awareness and knowledge regarding ticks, Lyme disease and protective measures. Additionally, your experience and perspectives are extremely valuable to inform future communication/awareness products.

### **Tick Surveillance**

#### **What is tick dragging and what is its purpose?**

Tick dragging is a standardized active surveillance method used in Ontario that is carried out twice yearly. The purpose of active surveillance is to gather evidence that ticks have established their lifecycle in an area. If, through tick dragging, blacklegged ticks are found in the same location in spring and again in fall, we know that the tick lifecycle is established in the area.

#### **How are tick dragging locations chosen?**

Tick dragging locations are selected using information from local tick submissions, human case investigation and presence of habitat that would support a tick population.

SMDHU works with municipal and community partners to identify appropriate tick-dragging locations and seek appropriate permissions to do so. Active surveillance activities are focused on areas where ticks have not yet established their lifecycle.

### **Additional Information**

#### **Where to go for more information?**

For more information about ticks, tick-bites, and Lyme disease visit [smdhu.org/lyme](http://smdhu.org/lyme). For local surveillance data visit our [HealthStats webpage](#).

Additional information and resources are available from:

- [Public Health Ontario](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Health](#)
- [Government of Canada \(Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada\)](#)



Appendix 1: Tick Zone Signage.

**ATTENTION**

**YOU'RE IN A  
TICK ZONE**

**A BITE FROM A TICK CAN MAKE YOU SICK!**

Do a **full body tick-check** after being outdoors to prevent Lyme disease.

Watch this video to learn how.

**SCAN NOW**

**PREVENT TICK BITES:**

- Cover Up**
- Use Bug Repellent**
- Stay on the Trail**

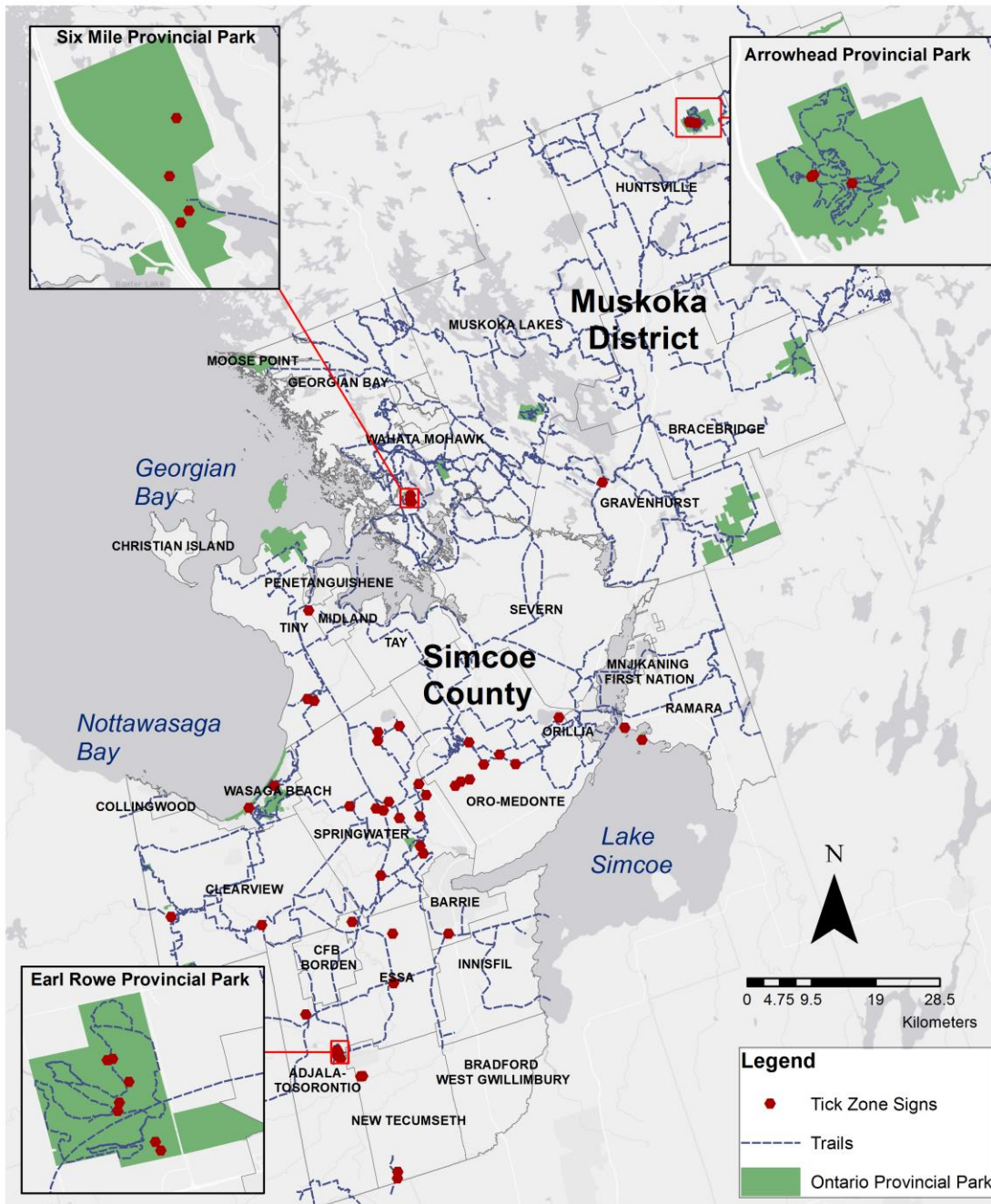
**simcoe muskoka** DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

For more information visit **SMDHU.ORG/LYME**



Appendix 2: 2021 Tick Zone Signs Postings (Reported) in Simcoe County and District of Muskoka

2021 Tick Zone Sign Postings in Simcoe County and District of Muskoka



Data Source:  
Tick Zone Signage External Partner Survey, SMDHU  
Date Created: August 4, 2022.

Service Layer Credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community