

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Beware of Lyme disease this summer

With the long weekend approaching, many of us are spending more time outside enjoying our many trails of Dufferin-Caledon. It is important to spread awareness about Lyme disease, an incurable disease spread through ticks. Lyme disease affects many individuals annually. In Ontario, ticks are found on the shores of Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. However, the prevalence of ticks has expanded beyond the risk zones and may be found across Ontario. The risk of infection increases when warmer weather hits. In Ontario, approximately 70 per cent of all reported cases of ticks are in June, July and August. Ticks are tiny bugs, and with their painless bites, you may not realize you have been bitten. Once you are infected, you can spread the bacteria to other humans and pets, including dogs. Pets can also spread the infection to humans and can carry infected ticks into your home. To avoid ticks and Lyme disease, it is recommended that you examine yourself and your dogs after being outdoors. Last year, there were 393 reported cases of Lyme disease in Ontario. Many suspect the true number is even higher. Common symptoms consist of skin rashes, flu-like symptoms, headaches, spasms or swollen lymph nodes. It is important to remember that Lyme disease symptoms can differ from person to person. Further, some people may or may not experience symptoms. The most effective method of limiting the chances of being infected with Lyme disease is to prevent tick bites. Some ways to protect yourself include wearing long and light-coloured clothing, using insect repellent, paying close attention to areas such as your scalp, ankles, armpits, groin and behind your ears. If a tick is attached to you, use fine-tipped tweezers to pull the tick straight out. Lyme disease is extremely difficult to test for. The federal government recently changed the Lyme disease case definition for positive diagnosis of the disease. Ontario has accepted and adopted the federal definition. They are mandated to ensure Lyme disease cases are diagnosed and treated as early as possible, increase awareness about Lyme and ensure patient-focused care is accessible with timely, evidence-based and supportive clinical management and care for those living with Lyme. The Liberals have been in government for almost 15 years, and they have done very little in educating and treating people with Lyme disease. My Progressive Conservative colleague Toby Barrett introduced Private Member's Bill ? An Act to Require a Provincial Framework and Action Plan Concerning Vector-Borne and Zoonotic Diseases Act, 2014 ? mandating a provincial framework and action plan on vector-borne diseases like West Nile and Lyme. However, since the passage of the legislation, we are still waiting for the Liberals to create Lyme disease strategy framework. If you think you have Lyme disease or have gotten tick bite, go and see a doctor or healthcare practitioner immediately. For more information, please visit www.publichealthontario.ca

