

**Ministry of Health
and Long-Term Care**

Office of the Minister

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**Ministère de la Santé
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Dear Colleague:

As the climate continues to change, and we see higher temperatures here in Ontario, the most common tick-borne illness – Lyme disease – is becoming increasingly prevalent. I wanted to highlight the increased risk of tick-borne illnesses presenting in your clinical practice this year.

With ongoing surveillance from the local public health units and Public Health Ontario, we are making great strides in identifying those areas where Ontarians are at greatest risk of being infected with a tick-borne illness. However, we need to take into consideration that the rapid spread of tick populations and the mobility of our population put Ontarians at risk throughout the province. As health care providers, we have an important role in identifying emerging risks, so I encourage you to consider the possibility of tick-borne illnesses in your clinical practice.

As you are aware, the diagnosis of Lyme disease, particularly in the early stages, is primarily based on clinical symptoms and risk factors as assessed by physicians. Signs and symptoms can include: fever, chills, headache, rash, fatigue, muscle/joint aches; problems with your heartbeat, breathing, balance, and short-term memory. In the early stages of this infection, results of laboratory diagnostic tests provide only supportive evidence, and not the sole evidence for a diagnosis. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care continues to emphasize that physicians should exercise their own clinical judgement to diagnose tick-borne illnesses and treat without positive laboratory test results, when clinically warranted. As with treatment protocols for any diseases, you are encouraged to follow clinical practice guidelines developed by specialist bodies.

Following the release of *Ontario's 10-Step Education and Awareness Plan on Lyme disease* in 2016, my ministry has been working with the public health sector and with other stakeholders to make sure that Ontarians and health care providers have the information they need about Lyme disease. An example is the successful collaboration with our partners in camp and outdoor organizations, hunting and angling groups, and other organizations to develop a communications campaign aimed at improving awareness on Lyme disease and encouraging individuals who suspect they have been bitten by a tick to seek the opinion of a health care provider.

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We will follow this work by engaging the medical community to ensure that you have access to the most up-to-date information on hand, as well as explore research and diagnosis in order to combat this disease and to improve the care, treatment and support for Ontarians with Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses. I encourage you to continue sharing with us your experiences, so we understand better the realities of managing these complex diseases and your needs in the provision of evidenced-based care.

I want to thank all physicians, nurses, and allied health care professionals for what you do every day on the front lines of our health care system and my sincere gratitude to you for your commitment to improving the health of Ontarians.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Hoskins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dr. Eric Hoskins
Minister