Hazard Alert & Safety Reminder

It’s Tick Season!

Prevention & Actions to prevent illness

Details of First Aid Incident:
On May 14, 2008, a large tick was discovered and removed from the scalp of a Silviculture staff member’s head by the First Aid attendant on shift at the Northwood Pulpmill.

The staff member had noted a small sore lump on her scalp after returning home from working Saturday supervising planting contractors throughout the Pelican Operating Area. She believed that the lump was probably the result of a small bug bite, such as a spider; as the incident seemed fairly routine, she decided to monitor the bite over the next few days and take action if the situation changed.

Since Saturday, the immediate area surrounding the lump had become inflamed and red, while the back side of her head where the bite was located had become very sensitive and painful to touch in addition to increasing soreness of the neck muscles on the side affected by the bite. She had been checking out the area with mirrors at night but could not see more than a discolored lump between all the hair follicles.

Recognizing that the situation had changed, she brought her concerns to a few fellow co-workers within Prince George Woodlands. After a few second opinions, she decided to visit the Level Three First Aid Attendant on-site located adjacent to the Canfor Administration Centre at Northwood Pulpmill. The first aid attendant inspected the area of concern under a high-powered magnifying glass; he subsequently agreed that the lump appeared to be a tick.

The tick was removed by heating up a metal rod on a stovetop element and consecutively burning the tick in the backside, as this was agreed on by the individuals occupying the Pulpmill’s security office, as well as the patient, as the known ‘best practice’ for safe tick removal. The tick proceeded to back itself out partially from the burning treatments, but was finally removed with force from tweezers. The affected area was cleansed with an antiseptic wipe and sent back to work.

After researching information regarding tick prevalence, associated diseases and action plans in the case of an incident over the internet, the tick was packaged alive and will be couriered to the BC Center for Disease Control in Vancouver for correct species identification and preserved for future reference. Though it is possible for the tick to be tested for the known bacteria and/or diseases that they may host, the Center will only conduct testing if the affected individual reports symptoms associated with the diseases.

As a result of this First Aid Incident, the following key messages are provided:

Prevention:
1. Wear light colored clothing whenever possible; tuck in your shirt to your pants and your pants into your work boots if possible to reduce any skin exposure;
2. Walk on cleared trails wherever possible, as ticks usually attach themselves to you as you pass through brush or tall grass (ticks do not fly and they also do not drop from tree crowns);
3. Use insect repellent at your discretion as it could deter tick bites.
4. Complete a ‘tick check’ for yourselves and your canine companions at the end of every field day, whether your skin was covered or not. Focus on areas of greater perspiration such as your scalp, underarms and groin area.
5. Do not stop if you have found one tick – continue to search your whole body (or that of your dog) to ensure there are no additional risks to infection.
Tick Description and Disease Identification:
Ticks are tiny bugs that vary in color (e.g. black, grey, maroon, etc) and are typically the size of a sesame seed. Once they have attached to an animal or human, they will burrow their mouthparts down into the skin and only have their rear end exposed. They will feed on the animal’s blood and increase their body size up to that of a swollen raisin on average. After feeding if not identified and removed, they will drop off the animal and reproduce. Tick bite incidents most often occur throughout the early spring to summer depending on weather conditions and geographical location (i.e. March to July).

There are several types of ticks present in British Columbia, as well as numerous diseases which they may carry. However, human infection is rare but any bitten individual must be aware of the most common disease and the symptoms associated with potential infection: Lyme Disease.
Lyme Disease is caused by a bacterium transmitted from a tick bite. If you have the following symptoms within days or weeks after being bitten by a tick, report them to your family doctor immediately. Tell your doctor when and where a tick bit you.

1. General symptoms of fever, headache, muscle and joint pains, fatigue or weakness of the muscles of the face.
2. Skin rash, especially one that looks like a bull's eye. It may or may not be where the bite was.
3. In some cases paralysis may occur. The paralysis usually starts in the feet and legs and works its way up to the upper body, arms and head. This paralysis usually starts within a few hours to a day or two of the bite.

Currently there are no vaccines licensed in Canada for prevention or treatment of Lyme Disease. As such, prevention and prompt action to remove a tick are the best measures to treat the situation.

What to do if you discover a tick:

HOW TO PROPERLY REMOVE A TICK:

1. Using disinfected tweezers or forceps, gently get a hold of the tick as close to the skin as possible. DO NOT touch the tick with your hands, and wear latex gloves if available.
2. Without squeezing the tick, gently lift it straight off the skin. If the tick has been on the skin for over two hours (such as in the incident above), it is recommended that this action be completed by a doctor or first aid attendant as the tick is most likely strongly embedded within your skin. It is imperative that the whole tick is removed from the area to mitigate any future risk of infection.
3. Once the tick is removed, inspect the tick itself and the bite area to ensure no remnants of the insect are still attached to the affected individual. Cleanse the area with soap and water or antiseptic wipes or creams, and follow with thorough hand washing.
4. Save the tick in a small plastic container with a tight fitting lid. If it is still alive, place a dampened cotton ball (with water only) in the container with the tick. Label the container with the following information: name, address and phone numbers (home and work) of the person or animal bitten; part of the body that was bitten; date of tick bite and date of tick removal; and area of the province where the bite is believed to have occurred (i.e. Southwest of Prince George – Pelican FSR). If you have a family physician, also include their name and address for future reference.
5. Contact the Environment Health Unit in Prince George:

   4th floor – 1600 Third Avenue (i.e. blue and white building hosting the Native Friendship Center)
   Donna Bush – Public Health Protection Environmental Health Officer: 250.565.2150

   Northern Health will courier the tick to the BC Center for Disease Control; alternatively, you may send it yourself to the following address:

   BC Centre for Disease Control
   Vector-Borne Diseases Laboratory
   655 West 12th Ave
   Vancouver BC V5Z 4R4

   Store the tick in a container in the fridge if it has been removed after business hours until it can be shipped.

DO NOT REMOVE A TICK BY COVERING THE INSECT IN A PETROLEUM PRODUCT OR ATTEMPTING TO BURN IT OUT! These methods increase the risk of infection (as well as burn injuries).

For More Information:
BC Health Files - Tick Bites and Disease:  http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/hfile01.stm#E46E2
BC Center for Disease Control – Lyme Disease Information:  http://www.bccdc.org/topic.php?item=83
BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands Tick Information:  http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/ticksbc.htm