

# Tick bite prevention and Lyme disease awareness communications campaign 2026

## for Devon, Somerset, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly

### Context

Lyme disease was added to the UK Government’s Fingertips dataset in March 2022. There are around 1,500 laboratory-confirmed cases of Lyme disease in England and Wales each year, however, many cases will be treated by doctors without the need for laboratory tests, so the actual number of new cases is estimated to be 3000 to 4000 per year. The data do not include infections acquired in one area but diagnosed/treated in another. There is not yet sufficient data to show a trend over time.

Studies in Europe estimate that 1% to 5% of tick bites can lead to Lyme disease. On average, approximately 4-6% of ticks are infected in England and Wales, although this range can fluctuate in different areas and across years (averaging between 7% and 10% in some areas).

Tick bite risk changes seasonally. April to June is the peak season for tick activity and coinciding with warmer weather and increased outdoor activities in the UK.

Despite these data limitations, Lyme disease cases in Devon, Somerset, and the South West as a whole, are significantly higher than the England average – so keeping both public and professionals well informed about addressing the risk is important.

Table 1: Rate of laboratory confirmed Lyme disease diagnosis per 100,000 population (2024) in SW local authorities

| <b>England</b> | <b>South West Region</b> | <b>Somerset Council</b> | <b>Devon County Council</b> | <b>Plymouth City Council</b> | <b>Torbay Council</b> | <b>Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Councils</b> |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 1.6            | 4.0                      | 5.5                     | 3.8                         | 2.2                          | 2.2                   | 2.4  |

Source: [Health Protection - Data | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care](#)

### Role of Local Authority Health Protection

By sharing information locally, we can support the National “be tick aware” campaign. Ticks are common across the varied countryside of Devon and surrounding counties, so with the Lyme disease incidence data, that makes the campaign a public health priority for Devon County Council and neighbouring local authorities. Helping people prevent tick bites, and respond quickly and effectively where bites occur, can to reduce Lyme disease and other tick-borne infections. The countryside in Devon and the wider Southwest is widely used for work and recreation, providing many opportunities to share prevention and awareness messages to help people everyone enjoy outdoor environments safely.

## Aims of campaign

- Follow national guidance to provide consistent tick-bite prevention and Lyme disease awareness messaging, across Devon and the wider Southwest, engaging multiple stakeholders to utilise their communication routes.
- Promote simple tick-bite prevention measures, support tick identification, encourage prompt and effective tick-bite management, and advise when to seek medical help.
- Strengthen local medical professionals' awareness of the elevated Lyme disease risk so tick-borne infections are appropriately considered when assessing symptoms.
- Encourage participation in tick-surveillance activities to improve health protection data.
- Share balanced messaging that highlights both the outdoor opportunities offered by Devon and the Southwest and the importance of minimising risk while enjoying or working in these environments
- Encourage all professionals, volunteers, walk leaders and guides etc to have specific information about ticks in their workplace risk assessments.

## What can stakeholders do?

1. Use the suggested text and resources to reach appropriate public and professionals newsletters, bulletins, social media etc
2. Let us know you have placed messaging, for coordination and evaluation purposes, via:
  - Devon (and cross boundary organisations) [healthprotection@devon.gov.uk](mailto:healthprotection@devon.gov.uk)
  - Torbay - [healthprotection@torbay.gov.uk](mailto:healthprotection@torbay.gov.uk)
  - Plymouth - [odph@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:odph@plymouth.gov.uk)
  - Cornwall - [healthprotection@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:healthprotection@cornwall.gov.uk)

## Campaign Timing

- 24-30 March - Tick Bite Prevention Week.
- Ahead of Easter/Summer holiday periods for schools, early years settings, family events and outdoor attractions.
- Throughout warmer months in the UK (June-September) when many common tick species are at their most active.

## Target Audiences, Key messages and Assets

The following pages have **highlighted** sections specific to different audiences. Each section includes short and long format messages and suggested links for;

1. General Public, Walkers, Runners, Off road cyclists, Tourism sector, users of parks and recreational spaces
2. Animal businesses, dog walking/other animal walking, farm parks
3. Farmers/Smallholders
4. Vets
5. Human healthcare, GPs and pharmacy
6. Military and reservists
7. Parents/carers/teachers of young people

## Evaluation/Feedback

Stakeholders are asked to report back via email to their local authority health protection team to say where resources were shared, so as the reach of campaign can be understood.

The campaigns reach will be reported back to Devon Climate Emergency re climate adaptation strategy (Emily Reed) and the Peninsula Antimicrobial Resistance prevention Group (PARG).

## Other Resources

[UKHSA tick awareness comms toolkit 2025](#) which differs from [UKHSA 'Be tick aware' toolkit](#) which is available on GOV.UK and gives more detailed information.

[Lyme Disease UK \(charity website\)](#)

[Lyme Disease Action \(charity website\)](#)

[OPTICK - research into tick-borne diseases in UK farmland](#)

Image showing just how tiny ticks can be!



## Setting specific messages

For any of the **highlighted audiences** below, you can use this alternative headline for Tick Bite Prevention Week:

**Enjoy the great outdoors but #betickaware - 24-30 March is Tick Bite Prevention Week.**

1. **General Public**; Walkers, Runners, Off road cyclists, Tourism sector, users of parks and recreational spaces

Social media video: [Enjoy the great outdoors but be tick aware!](#)

Social media image: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aG0hu8VP-dJEpzPCqlwdfc4NhLi57fq-/view?usp=sharing>

Check out UKHSA's blog post for more info: <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2024/03/21/what-is-lyme-disease-and-why-do-we-need-to-be-tick-aware>

Key message (short text):

**Enjoy the great outdoors but #betickaware.** Ticks are small, bloodsucking, spider-like creatures that live in grassland and woodland habitats. Some ticks can pass on infectious diseases when they bite

you or your pets. Learn how to protect yourself, manage tick bites and stop the spread of diseases such as Lyme disease. [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#) or [#betickaware \(UKHSA leaflet for printing A5\)](#)

Key Message (long text):

**Enjoy the great outdoors but #betickaware.** Ticks are tiny spider-like parasites which live in grass, bracken and brambles, especially near the edges of woodland and on rough grassland. Some ticks can pass on very nasty infectious diseases like Lyme disease when they bite you or your pets. It's easy to take measures to protect yourself, and reduce the risk of being seriously unwell, by taking these simple steps when out in the countryside;

- wear light-coloured clothing so ticks can be spotted and regularly check clothing and exposed skin for ticks that might be crawling on you and brush them off immediately
- wear long trousers tucked in to socks/boots and long-sleeved tops, to reduce the chance of ticks getting at your skin to bite
- use an insect repellent (always follow the manufacturer's guidance, check it is effective for ticks)
- walk on clearly defined paths if possible, to avoid brushing against vegetation where ticks may be present
- if bitten, remove the tick as quickly as possible. Try not to squeeze the body of the tick as this increases the risk of infection – so use a tick removal tool or fine tweezers (or fingernails if you don't have a tool) to get underneath the ticks body and get it off quickly

Ticks wait on foliage for humans and other animals to brush past, then they climb on. They can take from ten minutes to two hours to find an area of skin to bite, and they bury their curved teeth deeply into the skin, remaining securely attached for days to feed on blood. Most ticks are plain brown or reddish brown and have six or eight legs depending on their life-cycle stage. Young ticks can be as small as a poppy seed but mature ticks, when fully fed can get up to 1cm in size.

After you have been walking in the countryside, check yourself, children, and pets for ticks. Brush them off if not attached, but if they have bitten, it is important to remove safely and quickly. Doing so will reduce the chance of becoming ill as it can take several hours for infections to be passed on as the tick feeds. If you find a tick, use a tick removal tool (or fine-tipped tweezers) to grasp the tick as close to the your skin's surface as possible. Take care not to squeeze or crush the tick as this could increase infection risk, and pull upward with steady, even pressure. Clean the bite area with antiseptic or soap and water [NHS 24 How to remove a tick \(2min09sec\) Youtube](#). Dispose of the tick when you have removed it, or you can send it into the [UKHSA Tick surveillance scheme](#).

Ticks that may cause Lyme disease and other infections, are found all over the UK, but high-risk areas include grassy and wooded areas, especially in Southwest England. They can also be found in some parks and gardens. Ticks can be active all year round, but they are most active in the UK from April to July, and into the autumn. Climate change with milder winters, only short cold spells, and more humid summers, mean more ticks survive and can be active throughout the year.

Only about 5% of ticks carry diseases but they can cause severe illness. Symptoms can be non-specific or caused by more than one pathogen (e.g. virus or bacteria), which can delay recognition and treatment of illness. Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that can be spread to humans by infected ticks which is usually easier to treat if it's diagnosed early. Some people get a "bullseye" rash around the bite, but this does not occur in all cases. Symptoms appear on average 14 days after the tick bite, however, they can occur between 2 days and 3 months and can be flu-like such as:

- High temperature, or feeling hot and shivery
- Headaches
- Aching joints and muscles
- Tiredness, weakness and loss of energy

Please see your GP if you/your child experience any of these symptoms after a tick bite. You will need to inform your GP that you/your child had a tick bite. Treatment for Lyme disease is with antibiotics and is most effective if started as early as possible (but antibiotics are not needed if you have a bite without symptoms). Do not worry if all of the tick has not been removed. Please do not try to dig out any retained tick mouth parts as this will increase the risk of skin infection. Retained parts will usually work their way out naturally as the skin repairs/grows. Most bites are harmless but it's best to know about the risks.

**Exercise is great for your health, so get outdoors and explore, but “be tick aware” and if you find a tick, remove it quick! [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#)**

2. **Animal Businesses;** dog walking/other animal walking, farm parks

Social media video: [Enjoy the great outdoors but be tick aware!](#)

Social media image: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aG0hu8VP-dJEpzPCqlwdfc4NhLi57fq-/view?usp=sharing>

Check out UKHSA's blog post for more info: <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2024/03/21/what-is-lyme-disease-and-why-do-we-need-to-be-tick-aware>

Key message (short texts):

**Enjoy the great outdoors but #betickaware.** Ticks are biting mites that look similar to spiders and live in grassland and woodland habitats. They only feed on blood, and while doing so, some can pass blood-borne diseases like Lyme disease to humans and animals, making them very unwell. It's best to prevent bites, but if bitten, remove ticks quickly to reduce the risk of disease. Encourage clients and employees to [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#)

**Enjoy the great outdoors but #betickaware.** Tick-borne Lyme disease in Devon is three times more common than in the rest of England. People who are active outdoors should be aware of how to prevent bites, and how and why they should remove ticks quickly if bitten. Lyme disease can present as fatigue and flu-like symptoms. [#betickaware \(UKHSA leaflet for printing A5\)](#)

3. **Farmers and Smallholders**

Social media image: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aG0hu8VP-dJEpzPCqlwdfc4NhLi57fq-/view?usp=sharing>

Check out UKHSA's blog post for more info: <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2024/03/21/what-is-lyme-disease-and-why-do-we-need-to-be-tick-aware>

Key message (short texts):

**#betickaware** Ticks are parasitic mites that live in grassland and woodland habitats. They only feed on blood, and while doing so, some can pass blood-borne diseases, like Lyme disease, making humans and animals very unwell to. Know how to protect yourself, and how to manage tick bites, to stop the spread of disease. [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#)

**#betickaware** Incidence of tick-borne Lyme disease in Devon is three times higher than the England average. Landowners and workers should be aware of tick bite prevention methods and how and why they should respond quickly if bitten. Lyme disease can present as fatigue and flu-like symptoms. [#betickaware \(UKHSA leaflet for printing A5\)](#)

Key Message (long text):

**Calling all farmers and smallholders: Be aware of the risk to human health from ticks**

Tick-borne Lyme disease is much more common in Devon and Somerset than the England average. It's best to prevent bites, but if bitten, it's important to remove ticks quickly to reduce the risk of disease.

Ticks are parasitic mites that look similar to spiders and live in grassland and woodland habitats. They only feed on blood, and while doing so, some can pass blood-borne diseases to human and animal hosts. Lyme disease is the most common tick-borne disease (in humans) in the UK. You can take simple measures to protect yourself.

- wear light-coloured clothing so ticks can be spotted and regularly check clothing and exposed skin for ticks that might be crawling on you and brush them off immediately
- wear long trousers tucked in to socks/boots and long-sleeved tops, to reduce the chance of ticks getting at your skin to bite
- use an insect repellent (always follow the manufacturer's guidance, check it is effective for ticks)
- if bitten, remove the tick as quickly as possible. Try not to squeeze the body of the tick as this increases the risk of infection – so use a tick removal tool or fine tweezers (or fingernails if you don't have a tool) to get underneath the ticks body and get it off quickly

Ticks can be as small as a poppy seed and hard to spot but even small ones can carry Lyme disease, which can cause debilitating tiredness and flu-like symptoms in humans, days, weeks or months after a bite. [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#)

Tick-borne livestock diseases like Louping ill, tick-borne fever and Babesiosis can harm your stock.

**After working outdoors, please check yourself for ticks - if you find a tick, remove it quick!**

[#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#)

4. **Vets**

UKHSA's blog post: <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2024/03/21/what-is-lyme-disease-and-why-do-we-need-to-be-tick-aware>

Key message (short text):

**#betickaware** Incidence of tick-borne Lyme disease in Devon and Somerset is significantly higher than the England average. Vets and animal care workers should be aware of tick bite prevention methods, and how and why they should respond quickly if bitten. Lyme disease can present as fatigue and flu-like symptoms. [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#) or [#betickaware \(UKHSA leaflet for printing A5\)](#)

Key Message (long text):

**Calling all vets and animal health workers: Be aware of the risk to human health from ticks**

Incidence of tick-borne Lyme disease in Devon and Somerset is significantly higher than the England average. Vets and animal health workers should be aware of tick bite prevention through workplace risk assessment. It's best to prevent bites, but if bitten, it's important to remove ticks quickly to reduce the risk of disease. Lyme disease can present as fatigue and flu-like symptoms, days, weeks or months after a bite. [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#)

You can take simple measures to protect yourself;

- wear light-coloured clothing so ticks can be spotted and regularly check clothing and exposed skin for ticks that might be crawling on you and brush them off immediately
- wear long trousers tucked in to socks/boots and long-sleeved tops, to reduce the chance of ticks getting at your skin to bite
- use an insect repellent (always follow the manufacturer's guidance, check it is effective for ticks)
- if bitten, remove the tick as quickly as possible. Try not to squeeze the body of the tick as this increases the risk of infection – so use a tick removal tool or fine tweezers (or fingernails if you don't have a tool) to get underneath the ticks body and get it off quickly

Animal care staff are at risk of tick bites while handling tick-infested animals. Ixodes Ricinus can transmit a large number of pathogens such as Borrelia burgdorferi (the causative agent of Lyme borreliosis), tick-borne encephalitis virus, Anaplasma phagocytophilum (agent of human granulocytic ehrlichiosis), Francisella tularensis (agent of Tularemia), Rickettsia helvetica, Rickettsia monacensis, Babesia divergens, Babesia microti, louping ill virus, and tick-borne encephalitis virus. [Ref: TVN.com](#)

UK dog owners should be vigilant in checking their pets for ticks, especially in dog types with higher risk e.g. dogs with pendulous ears, and curly or medium-length coats should be checked more closely. [RVC Ticks in Dogs - infographic](#)

You can help UKHSA monitor the spread of tick borne disease by sending ticks to the [UKHSA Tick surveillance scheme](#).

**After working outdoors/with animals, please check yourself for ticks - if you find a tick, remove it quick!** [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#)

5. **Human Healthcare (including GP, pharmacy)**

Social media; <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aG0hu8VP-dJEpzPCqlwdfc4NhLi57fq-/view?usp=sharing>

**3 Top Tick Tips** Ticks in England can carry infections, including Lyme disease which can present as flu-like symptoms, days, weeks or months after a bite. Around 5% of ticks carry Lyme but cases are significantly more common in the South West of England. Here are three tips to help you [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#)

1. raise index of suspicion for Lyme in response to incidence data [Lyme disease | Guidance | NICE](#)
2. send ticks into surveillance scheme [Tick awareness and the Tick Surveillance Scheme - GOV.UK](#)
3. complete the free 30minute RCGP e-learning module [RCGP e-learning module Lyme disease toolkit](#)

#### 6. **Military**

Military personnel are at increased risk of exposure to tick-borne infections both within the UK and whilst deployed overseas. Lyme disease is significantly more common in Devon and Somerset than the England average. It's best to prevent bites, but if bitten, it's important to remove ticks quickly to reduce the risk of disease so [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#). Lyme disease can present as fatigue and flu-like symptoms, days weeks or months after being bitten. Confirmed or suspected cases of Lyme disease should be reported via [RIDDOR](#)

#### 7. **Parents/carers and teachers of school aged and pre-school aged children and young people**

Social media video: [Enjoy the great outdoors but be tick aware!](#)

Social media image: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aG0hu8VP-dJEpzPCqlwdfc4NhLi57fq-/view?usp=sharing>

Check out UKHSA's blog post for more info: <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2024/03/21/what-is-lyme-disease-and-why-do-we-need-to-be-tick-aware>

Key message (short text):

#### **Enjoy the great outdoors but #betickaware**

As more outdoor activities take place during the spring and summer it is important to be aware of the risk of ticks to both children and adults. Ticks are biting mites that look similar to small spiders, and live in grassland and woodland habitats. Ticks are more common from spring to autumn and can spread infections like Lyme disease. Infection rates are much higher in Devon and Somerset than the England average. Please take a look at the attached information and advice to help reduce the risk of tick bites, understand the importance of checking for ticks after activities, and how to respond quickly if you find a tick bite or experience symptoms. [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#) [#betickaware \(UKHSA leaflet for printing A5\)](#)

Key message (long text):

#### **Enjoy the great outdoors but #betickaware**

Ticks are biting mites that look similar to spiders. Ticks are most commonly found from spring to autumn, in woodland, grassland, moorland and heathland, but can be in some urban parks, gardens and allotments. Some ticks pass on bacterial infections such as Lyme disease, which can be a severe illness. Devon and Somerset has lots of habitat suitable for ticks and Lyme disease rates are much higher, so to prevent spread of infection it is important to be tick aware when doing activities outdoors, such as forest or outdoor schools, field sports, school trips and residential etc.

The chance of getting a tick bite can be reduced:

- wear light-coloured clothing so ticks can be spotted and regularly check clothing and exposed skin for ticks that might be crawling on you and brush them off immediately
- wear long trousers tucked in to socks/boots and long-sleeved tops, to reduce the chance of ticks getting at your skin to bite
- use an insect repellent (always follow the manufacturer's guidance, check it is effective for ticks)
- walk on clearly defined paths to avoid brushing against vegetation where ticks may be present
- if bitten, remove the tick as quickly as possible. Try not to squeeze the body of the tick as this increases the risk of infection – so use a tick removal tool or fine tweezers (or fingernails if you don't have a tool) to get underneath the ticks body and get it off quickly

Even if doing these things to reduce the chance of being bitten, it is important to still check for ticks after outdoor activities as you cannot always feel you have been bitten, and removing them quickly reduces the risk of infection. Areas where ticks may frequently be found include skin folds, armpits, groin, wrist, waistband area, behind the knees, back of the neck and hairline.

If you find you have been bitten by a tick:

- remove the tick as soon as possible
- the safest way to remove a tick is to use a tick removal tool or a pair of fine-tipped tweezers
- grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull upwards slowly and firmly, as mouthparts left in the skin can cause a local infection
- once removed, clean the bite area with soap and water or apply antiseptic and
- keep an eye on it for several weeks for any changes

Early symptoms of Lyme Disease in humans may include mild flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache and fatigue. Sometimes, early symptoms are accompanied by a characteristic spreading bulls-eye rash.

The [#betickaware \(UKHSA leaflet for printing A5\)](#) outlines information which could be shared with parents to support awareness and the [#betickaware \(UKHSA poster\)](#) can be displayed in schools.

Lead author [deborah.jones@devon.gov.uk](mailto:deborah.jones@devon.gov.uk) – Feb 2026