



# News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

**NUMBER:**  
**FOR RELEASE:**  
<http://www.dhs.ca.gov>

85-01  
IMMEDIATE

**DATE:** December 17, 2001  
**CONTACT:** Ken August  
or Norma Arceo  
(916) 657-3064

## STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT CAUTIONS CALIFORNIANS ABOUT TICKS AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES

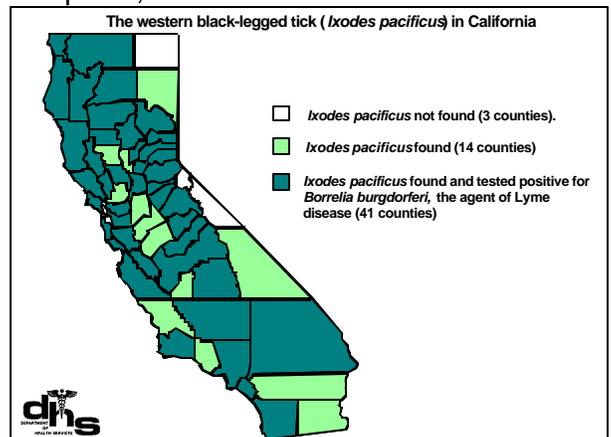
SACRAMENTO – Hikers, campers and other individuals who spend time outdoors need to be on the alert for ticks because some of them carry the bacteria that cause Lyme disease or agents that cause other tick-borne diseases, State Health Director Diana M. Bontá, R.N., Dr.P.H., warned today.

"You actually are more likely to encounter mature ticks in the late fall and winter than in the summer months as most people believe," Bontá said. "Because of California's temperate climate, adult ticks are abundant throughout the cooler months between late October and March and are particularly numerous in the grasses and shrubs of the damp coastal mountains and foothills."

The tick that transmits the agent of Lyme disease in California is the western-blacklegged tick. This species of tick has been found in most of California's counties, but is most common in the northwestern coastal areas and the western slope of the northern Sierra Nevada range.

Ticks may be found in tall grass and brush areas in urban, suburban and rural settings. Adult ticks climb to the tips of vegetation, often alongside trails or paths, and wait for a host to brush against them. Ticks feed by sticking their mouthparts into the skin and sucking blood. Diseases such as Lyme are transmitted only while the tick is attached and feeding.

"Early symptoms of Lyme disease often include a characteristic spreading rash, which is usually accompanied by flulike symptoms, such as fever and body aches," said Bontá. "Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics, and nearly all patients recover completely without complications, particularly when the disease is caught early. However, if left untreated, symptoms can progress into arthritis or nervous system disorders."



Symptoms of ehrlichiosis, a disease also transmitted by the western-blacklegged tick, can range from no symptoms to severe disease. Like Lyme disease, symptoms are generally nonspecific and flulike. Individuals with ehrlichiosis also can be treated with antibiotics.

The first line of defense against tick-borne diseases is to take proper precautions to avoid tick bites, Bontá emphasized. She offered the following suggestions to reduce exposure to bites in tick habitat:

- Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Tuck pant legs into boots or socks and tuck shirts into pants.
- Wear light-colored clothing so ticks can be easily seen.
- Inspect yourself frequently for ticks while in a tick habitat. Once out of a tick habitat, thoroughly check your entire body for ticks. Parents should examine their children, especially on the scalp and hairline.
- Use a repellent registered for use against ticks. Always follow directions on the container and be extra careful when applying to children.
- Stay in the middle of the trail. Avoid trail margins, brush and grassy areas.

Individuals who discover a tick attached to their body should remove it as soon as possible to reduce the possibility of infection. The tick can be removed by grasping it with fine-pointed tweezers and pulling it gently, but firmly straight out. Insecticides, lighted matches or gasoline should not be used to remove ticks because these techniques are ineffective. Individuals should then wash their hands and apply antiseptic to the affected area. Anyone who develops symptoms associated with Lyme disease and ehrlichiosis should consult his or her physician.