

BABESIOSIS

What is babesiosis?

Babesiosis is a tickborne disease caused by *Intraerythrocytic protozoan* parasites. These parasites are most commonly spread to humans by the bite of an infected tick.

Babesiosis may be transmitted by infected blacklegged ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*), the same species of ticks that spreads Lyme Disease. York Region is identified as a Lyme disease risk area where blacklegged ticks have been identified and people may come into contact with infected ticks.

Most people infected with babesiosis do not develop symptoms, however, some people may experience symptoms listed below.

How does babesiosis spread?

Babesiosis is usually carried by infected blacklegged ticks that are found on tall grasses and bushes in wooded areas almost anywhere in Ontario, including York Region. An infected tick must be attached for at least 24 hours to transmit the infection. Less commonly, the parasites can spread through blood transfusions, solid organ transplantation, and congenital transmission (e.g., during pregnancy/delivery from mother to baby).

Symptoms of babesiosis

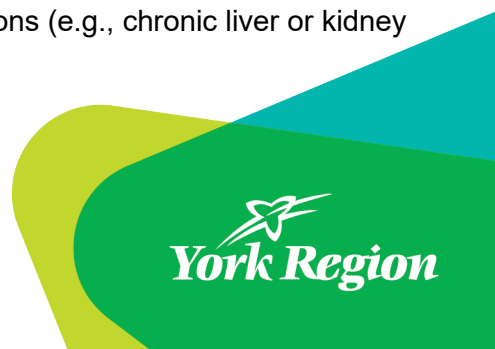
- Fever
- Chills
- Intense sweats
- Headaches
- Body aches
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Anemia
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin)
- Dark urine
- An enlarged liver and spleen
- Low platelets

Symptoms typically occur one to four weeks after the bite of an infected tick and one to nine weeks (up to six months) after a contaminated blood transfusion. Long-term (chronic) infections may last from weeks to months.

There is an increased risk of severe illness for people with weakened immune systems (e.g., due to cancer, AIDS, transplantation, or being on certain medications), serious health conditions (e.g., chronic liver or kidney disease), and those who are over 50 years of age.

PUBLIC HEALTH

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Preventing babesiosis

<i>When outdoors</i>	<i>When indoors</i>
• Use insect repellent containing DEET or icaridin • Wear closed shoes and light-coloured, long sleeve shirts and long pants, and tuck pants into socks • Wear permethrin-treated clothing • Protect yourself when visiting wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter • Walk in the center of trails	• Check your body for ticks after spending time outdoors, paying close attention to areas such as the groin, scalp, underarms and back • Remove attached ticks from your and your pets' bodies as soon as possible • Check clothing and gear for ticks • Shower soon after being outdoors

Treating babesiosis

People who have experienced a tick bite and/or the symptoms listed above should contact their doctors to discuss possible treatment options.