May Is Lyme Disease Awareness Month



If your workers work outside, one of the safety hazards you may need to protect them from is the risk of being bitten by ticks and thus contracting Lyme disease. (You may also need to protect them from other insects as well.) And because May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month, it's the perfect time to educate at risk workers on how to avoid tick bites.

Some of the occupations most vulnerable to tick bites include:

- Construction
- Landscaping and brush clearing
- Farming
- Forestry
- Railroad work
- Oil field work
- Utility line work
- Land surveying
- Park or wildlife management.

Ticks live in tall grass and wooded areas, and are usually active April through October, with peak activity from June through August.

Preventing tick bites is important because such bites can transmit Lyme disease. This illness is spread by the bite of an infected blacklegged tick (also called a deer tick) or western blacklegged tick, which are very hard to see and much smaller than the common dog and cattle ticks.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, although not all blacklegged ticks carry Lyme disease, populations of infected blacklegged ticks are growing'meaning the risk of contracting Lyme disease is on the rise across Canada.

To protect workers from tick bites, tell them to do the following when working in areas where ticks may be present:

- Wear closed-toe shoes, long-sleeved shirts and pants
- Pull socks over pant legs to prevent ticks from crawling up legs
- Wear light-coloured clothes to make spotting ticks easier
- Use insect repellents that contain DEET or Icaridin. Repellents can be applied to clothing as well as exposed skin. Always read and follow label directions
- Shower or bathe within two hours of being outdoors to wash away loose ticks
- Do a daily 'full body' check for ticks.

If a worker finds a tick on his skin, removing it within 24-36 hours of the tick bite usually prevents infection. To remove a tick, using clean tweezers, carefully grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible. Pull slowly upward, but try not to twist or crush the tick. If parts of the tick's mouth break off and remain in the skin, remove them with tweezers.

Once the tick is removed, wash the area with soap and water or disinfect it with alcohol or hand sanitizer. Save the tick in a plastic bag that you can seal or a pill bottle. Record the location and date of the bite. You can store the container for up to 10 days in the refrigerator (for live ticks) or freezer (for dead ticks).