LABSTRACT – August 2021

Changes to Passive Tick Surveillance Program in Ontario

Audience
Healthcare providers and local public health units who submit ticks for identification to Public Health Ontario (PHO).

Overview
The National Microbiology Laboratory (NML) will no longer accept blacklegged ticks submitted through the passive surveillance program for pathogen testing, as of September 20, 2021. Submitters will only receive tick identification results performed at PHO and will no longer receive pathogen results from their submitted ticks.

Background information
For more than 20 years, PHO has accepted ticks from members of the public, either through their health care providers or local public health units, as part of Ontario’s passive tick surveillance program. The submitted ticks were identified and results were reported back to the submitters. All ticks identified as blacklegged ticks were subsequently sent to the NML for pathogen testing, where they were tested for Borellia burgdorferi (the agent of Lyme disease), B. miyamotoi, Anaplasma phagocytophilum and Babesia microti. The results were reported to the submitter upon completion of pathogen testing (which could take up to six months).

The intent of the passive tick surveillance program was to encourage members of the public to submit ticks, which helped to inform public health officials’ active surveillance efforts in identifying new Lyme disease risk areas. PHO continues to receive a significant number of ticks from jurisdictions already identified as Lyme disease risk areas. It is important to note that the tick identification and pathogen testing of ticks as part of Ontario’s surveillance system were not designed to aid in management of patients following tick bites. As risk areas in Ontario continue to change, it is important to make changes to the passive surveillance program to ensure that the surveillance program continues to be relevant and efficient (i.e., that it can efficiently determine potential new Lyme disease risk areas and monitor for other tick-borne pathogens in addition to Lyme disease).
Revised Surveillance Program:

As of September 20, 2021:

1. PHO will continue to accept ticks for identification from members of the public through health care providers and local public health units. The tick identification results will be reported to submitters. It may take up to three weeks to receive identification results back from PHO’s laboratory during peak season. The online platform (etick.ca) may be an alternative option if you require a faster result.

2. PHO will no longer send blacklegged ticks to NML for pathogen testing. As a result of this change, submitters will no longer receive pathogen results from their submitted ticks.

References

Robbin Lindsay, L., Memo -Public Health Agency of Canada, National Microbiology Laboratory, Winnipeg, MB, 7 Aug 2021

Robbin Lindsay, L., Memo-Amendment to notification concerning discontinuation of tick testing as part of passive tick surveillance at the National Microbiology Laboratory: Does it apply to health care professionals?, Public Health Agency of Canada, National Microbiology Laboratory, Winnipeg, MB, 6 Aug 2021

For further information

- Contact the PHOL Customer Service Centre at 416-235-6556 or 1-877-604-4567 (toll free) or by email at CustomerServiceCentre@oahpp.ca.
- Email customerservicecentre@oahpp.ca to subscribe to PHO’s Labstracts.
- PHO Lyme disease resource page: publichealthontario.ca/lymedisease
- PHO specimen collection information and previous Labstracts, refer to publichealthontario.ca/Labs
- The Tick Identification for Passive Surveillance Form and other forms are available at publichealthontario.ca/Requisitions

Document Change History

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<th>Revision Number</th>
<th>Date of Implementation</th>
<th>Description and Change</th>
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<td>September 17, 2021</td>
<td>New Lababstract</td>
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