

POWASSAN VIRUS INFECTION (POWV)

What is POWV?

POWV infection spreads to humans through the bite of an infected tick.

POWV may be transmitted by infected blacklegged ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*), the same species of ticks that spreads Lyme Disease. It is less commonly spread through groundhog ticks and squirrel ticks. 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 POWV do not experience symptoms, however, some people may develop the symptoms listed below.

How does POWV spread?

POWV 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. It may take as quick as 15 minutes for POWV to be spread from an infected tick. There has been one documented case of a possible blood transfusion-associated infection.

Symptoms of POWV

- Fever
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Feeling physically weak or a lack of energy
- Muscle aches
- Some infected people may have more serious neurologic symptoms such as confusion, loss of coordination, difficulty speaking, paralysis, seizures or coma

Symptoms typically occur one week to one month after being bitten by an infected tick. Approximately 50% of people who survive severe disease have long-term health problems such as recurring headaches, loss of muscle mass, and strength and memory problems.

PUBLIC HEALTH

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Preventing POWV

<i>When outdoors</i>	<i>When indoors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check your body for ticks after spending time outdoors, paying close attention to areas such as groin, scalp, underarm 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 POWV

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