REDUCING YOUR RISK OF TICK-BORNE DISEASE:
Blacklegged ticks, also known as deer ticks, live in shady, moist areas at ground level. They will cling to tall grass, brush and shrubs, usually no more than 18-24 inches off the ground. They also live in lawns and gardens, especially at the edges of woods and around old stone walls. Deer ticks cannot jump or fly, and do not drop onto passing people or animals. They get on humans and animals only by direct contact. Once a tick gets on the skin, it generally climbs upward until it reaches a protected area.

Risk of acquiring a tick-borne disease is greatest in late spring/early summer when small, immature nymphs are active, likely since bites from these ticks go unnoticed.

• Wear light-colored clothing with a tight weave to spot ticks easily.
• Regularly check for ticks on yourself when outside and shower promptly after outdoor activity.
• Consider using insect repellents following instructions on label.
• Wear enclosed shoes, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. Tuck pant legs into socks or boots and shirt into pants.
• Consult your veterinarian about treating your dog or cat with tick-killing pesticides (acaricides), and using tick collars.
• There is no evidence that tick-borne pathogens, including POW/DTV, can be transmitted by eating deer meat.

HOW TO REMOVE A TICK:
Don’t panic. Not all ticks are infected, and your risk of acquiring Lyme disease is greatly reduced if the tick is removed within the first 36 hours after attachment.

REMOVE THE TICK PROMPTLY AND PROPERLY:
• Using fine pointed tweezers, grasp the tick as close to skin as possible.
• Gently pull the tick in a steady, upward motion.
• Wash the area with a disinfectant.
• Monitor the bite site for 30 days for expanding red rash, and consult your physician if you feel unwell following a tick bite.

WHEN TRYING TO REMOVE A TICK:
• Do NOT touch the tick with your bare hands.
• Do NOT squeeze the body of the tick as this may increase your risk of infection.
• Do NOT put alcohol, nail polish remover or vaseline on the tick. This may increase your risk of infection.
• Do NOT put a hot match or cigarette on the tick in an effort to make it “back out”. This may increase your risk of infection.
Since 2015, Paul Smith’s College’s Adirondack Watershed Institute has surveyed for blacklegged ticks (Ixodes scapularis) at over 40 sites in six North Country counties (Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Herkimer and St. Lawrence). Blacklegged tick density was highest at the lowest elevations, but ticks were also found at higher elevations sites (exceeding 1600 feet). Tick populations are still patchy, but there is risk of encounter throughout the North County.

In 2018, 546 ticks collected from eight sites in the North Country were tested for human pathogens, including those that cause Lyme disease, babesiosis and anaplasmosis. Infection rates are shown in the table above right. At several sites, including locations in Essex County, approximately a quarter of ticks were found to be infected with more than one pathogen, and a small percentage of ticks were found to be infected with all three pathogens.

Powassan virus disease is a rare, but sometimes serious, disease that is caused by Powassan virus (POW) or Deer tick virus (DTV), and is transmitted through the bite of infected ticks. Systematic surveillance for POW/DTV in the North Country was conducted for the first time in Fall 2018. The most sensitive method involves testing blood from hunter-harvested deer for presence of antibodies, which indicates prior exposure to the virus. Over 100 blood samples were collected, and on average 40% of North Country deer showed evidence of POW/DTV exposure. The geographic distribution of samples collected by wildlife management unit (WMU), and results of antibody testing, are shown in the map on the left. This indicates there is risk of Powassan virus disease in the North Country. Risk in this region is still lower than some other areas of the state where the majority of deer test positive.