

TICK BITES AND LYME DISEASE

Lyme disease is an infection caused by a certain type of bacteria called a spirochete. It is spread to people by the bite of infected deer ticks. Lyme disease is common throughout the Northeastern United States, particularly in southern New England.

How Do People Get Lyme Disease?

People get Lyme disease by being bitten by a deer tick that is carrying the Lyme bacteria. Deer ticks are very small in size. The nymph (baby) tick is about the size of the period at the end of this sentence. An adult deer tick may be the size of a small seed. To transmit the bacteria, the tick usually must be attached to a person for 48 hours or longer.

What Are the Symptoms of Lyme Disease?

Early symptoms (days to weeks after the infected tick bite):

- Erythema Migrans (EM): EM is the telltale Lyme disease rash that starts as a small red bump at the site of the tick bite and spreads out slowly to form an irregularly-shaped red ring with the tick bite at the center. The ring can be as small as a dime or as large as a person's whole back. Sometimes, the EM rash is accompanied by fever, headaches, body aches, or fatigue, but not always.

Later Symptoms (weeks to months after the infected tick bite; Lyme disease can cause a wide variety of later symptoms, the following are the most common):

- Disseminated EM: Red ring-like circles similar to the primary EM rash, but appearing in multiple places on the body, not just at the site of the original tick bite.
- Arthritis: Swelling and pain in the joints which may move from one joint to another; the knee is most commonly affected.
- Neurological Symptoms: These symptoms may include severe headaches, stiff neck, paralysis of the facial muscles, and many others.

How Is Lyme Disease Treated?

Lyme disease can usually be treated successfully with oral antibiotics. Sometimes intravenous antibiotics are needed for late stage infections.

How Can Lyme Disease Be Prevented?

- Avoid tick bites:
 - Stay out of wooded, grassy areas in the warm weather months, if possible;
 - If entering tick-infested areas, wear long pants and long sleeved shirts and apply DEET-containing insect repellent.
- Check for and remove ticks daily:
 - Anytime your child has been playing outside in grassy or wooded areas in the warm weather months, check him or her before bed for ticks, especially on the scalp, ankles, groin and underarms;
 - Remove any ticks you find on your child by grasping the tick with tweezers as near to the skin as possible and pulling the tick SLOWLY away from the skin; wash the area well with soap and water.

When Should Someone Seek Treatment For Possible Lyme Disease?

- Antibiotic treatment is NOT recommended for tick bites without a rash; if you find a tick attached to your child's skin, remove it as explained above and monitor the area of the tick bite for the next few weeks to look for a rash. You do not need to seek medical attention for a tick bite if a rash does not develop.
- The following may be signs of Lyme disease. Please seek medical attention for any of the following:
 - any rash occurring at the site of a tick bite, particularly a rash in the shape of a red ring
 - single or multiple red ring-like rashes on the body, whether or not a known tick bite has occurred
 - one or more red, swollen joints
 - severe headache, particularly if associated with a sore or stiff neck
 - droopiness on one side of the face