

LYME DISEASE

What Is Lyme Disease?

Lyme Disease is an infectious disease that is spread to humans by the bite of an infected tick.

How Is Lyme Disease Spread?

The bite of an infected tick can pass the bacteria to a human, especially if the tick has been attached for at least 24 hours.

Not all ticks carry Lyme Disease, and even a Lyme tick bite does not always mean you will get the disease. Prompt removal of a tick will lessen the chance of getting the disease.

What Are Signs of Lyme Disease?

Early: The first symptom of Lyme Disease is usually, but not always, a skin rash. While the tick may go undetected, the rash occurs at the site of the bite. It begins as a small red area three to 32 days after the bite, then gradually enlarges, often with partial clearing in the center, so it looks like a donut. There may be other lesions, occasionally described as burning or itching.

Other skin signs include hives, redness of the cheeks and under the eyes (swelling of the eyelids with reddening of the whites of the eyes). You may also have flu-like signs such as fever, headache, stiff neck, sore and aching muscles and joints, fatigue, sore throat, and swollen glands.

These symptoms may disappear on their own in a few weeks. The rash may recur in about half of untreated people, and more serious problems may develop later. Treatment with antibiotics clears up the rash within days and may prevent complications.

Late: The joints, nervous system, and heart can be affected weeks to months after the initial tick bite, although symptoms usually appear within four to six weeks. A small number of people with Lyme Disease may get symptoms during later stages without having had the early skin rash.

Arthritis in the large joints, such as the knee, elbow, and wrist, occurs in as many as half of untreated persons. The arthritis can move from joint to joint and can become chronic.

A small number of people may have a severe headache and stiff neck (aseptic meningitis), facial paralysis, and weakness and pain in the arms and legs or chest. These signs can last weeks. The heart muscle can become infected.

What Is the Treatment for Lyme Disease?

Antibiotics are used to treat Lyme Disease. Early treatment of early symptoms may prevent more serious problems.

How Can Lyme Disease Be Prevented?

The only way to get Lyme Disease is from a bite from an infected tick. Knowing where these ticks are found, avoiding such areas, and (if bitten) promptly removing the tick are the primary preventive measures. Persons living in or visiting high-risk areas should take the following preventive measures:

- Don't walk barelegged in tall grass, woods, or dunes where ticks may be found.
- Conduct daily "tick checks." The ticks are most often found on the thigh, flank, arms, underarms, and legs, and are very small. Look for new "freckles."
- To remove a tick, use tweezers to grip its body firmly and pull it straight out. If using fingers, place a protective covering between your fingers and the tick, and wash your hands afterward. Apply an antiseptic to the bitten area. (It may help to apply petroleum jelly over the tick prior to removing it, as this helps the tick to back out of the skin.)
- After removing, destroy the tick by drowning it in alcohol or kerosene. (Keep these solutions out of the reach of children.)

- Know the symptoms of Lyme Disease. **If you have been in an area where ticks are found between May and early autumn and you develop such symptoms, particularly the skin rash and “flu” symptoms, see a physician at once.**

Where Can I Get More Information?

Your physician at the Eastern Carolina Family Practice Center (252-816-4611)

Your local health department