

# Infection Prevention and You



## Lyme disease

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that can result from the bite of an infected deer tick. It was first described in 1977 and got its name from a case that occurred in Lyme, Connecticut. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of reported cases has gradually risen since 1994. Infected ticks are found mainly in the Northeast, upper Midwest and along the Northwest coast. This infection, if left untreated, can affect the heart, muscles, joints, and nervous system. The good news is that most people who are bitten by a tick will not develop Lyme disease (less than 1 percent).

Deer ticks can be found throughout the year, but their peak activity occurs during June, July, and August when it is warm and moist. Female ticks have four pairs of legs and are red and black in color. The male deer tick is all black. Adults are very small but visible and about the size of a sesame seed. Unless a tick has been attached for a feeding for more than 36 hours, the risk of infection is very small.

### What is the best way to remove a tick?

- Use pointed tweezers
- Grasp the tick very close to your skin, by its head, not the body
- Pull firmly using steady motion
- Avoid crushing the body
- Wash the site with rubbing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or soap and water
- Do not use old remedies such as a lit match, Vaseline, or nail polish remover

After the tick is removed, watch the area of the bite for the next 30 days. Contact your doctor immediately if you develop a rash or flu-like symptoms.

### How do I know I have been infected?

Early symptoms of Lyme disease are usually mild and therefore easily missed. They may include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Characteristic skin rash

In 60-80 percent of cases, the first sign is a rash called "erythema migrans," which appears between 3 days and 1 month after the tick bite. The rash occurs at or near the location of the bite. It usually looks like a "bull's eye" with a circular solid red patch that extends out about 2-6 inches and usually lasts 3-5 weeks. It may be warm to the touch but not usually painful or itchy, and it can appear on several areas of the body.

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## What is the treatment?

Bites that do not result in symptoms do not require treatment. However, if you think you have any of the signs mentioned, you should see a doctor or healthcare provider immediately. Early treatment with antibiotics almost always results in a complete cure. Occasionally someone develops chronic infection lasting months to even years. The earlier that treatment is started, the greater the chances of complete cure.

## Prevention is key, so follow these simple steps:

### DON'T

- Spray your face with insect repellent
- Breathe in bug spray
- Spray cuts, sunburns, or rashes
- Apply insect repellent to the hands of small children
- Apply under clothes

### DO

- Stay on cleared, well-travelled paths
- Wear light colored clothing
- Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants in wooded or grassy area
- Tuck pants into socks
- Spray repellent only when outdoors
- Follow the directions on the spray container
- Check clothes and uncovered skin frequently when outdoors
- Wash off repellent when you go indoors

## What else can I do to protect myself and my family?

- Keep lawns mowed
- Clear brush or tall grass around your home
- Don't sit directly on the ground or grass
- Stack wood away from the house and ideally off the ground
- Put swing sets and play equipment in sunny, dry area away from woods

Unfortunately, Lyme disease affects many people in the United States each year. The good news is that by taking the simple steps discussed here you can decrease the chances that you or your loved ones will be one of them. So enjoy a healthy summer and contact your local health department or the CDC.gov website for more information.

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