

ARE YOU READY?



Get Ready

AN INITIATIVE OF THE
AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

How to stay safe from Lyme disease

Lyme disease and other tick-borne infections are a growing problem in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says there are at least 30,000 new cases of Lyme disease every year. Here's what you need to know to stay safe.

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is caused by a type of bacteria. When an infected tick bites someone, the bacteria enters the human body and can cause disease.

Lyme disease can start with a round rash that looks like a bull's-eye, though that doesn't appear in all cases. More serious symptoms occur later, including joint and nerve problems. Lyme disease can't be spread from person to person.

Lyme disease was first seen in the mid-1970s around Lyme, Connecticut. Today, most infections occur in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, northern Midwest, and the West Coast, particularly northern California. Lyme disease is not the only disease spread by tick bites. Babesiosis, tularemia and Rocky Mountain spotted fever are some of the other infections spread by ticks.



Photo by Jeff Wilkinson, courtesy/Stockphoto

What are the symptoms? How can I prevent tick bites?



Lyme disease can cause a wide variety of symptoms. Early symptoms include rashes, headaches, pain, swelling and dizziness.

Left untreated, Lyme disease can cause arthritis, numbness, tingling and short-term memory problems. Lyme disease can be easy to miss at first, as you might never even notice that a tick bit you.

The best way to prevent Lyme disease is to avoid tick bites. While you don't have to stay indoors, you should know how to keep ticks off. To stay safe, wear long pants and sleeves when spending time outside, especially in summer. Wear light-colored clothing to make ticks stand out. Put on socks and close-toed shoes in the woods and grass, and stay in the middle of trails. Use insect repellent with

DEET that has been approved by the Environmental Protection Agency.

A thorough tick check is important after any time spent outdoors, especially for kids. Ticks are tiny, some even as small as

the head of a pin. Go over all parts of your body slowly and carefully. Be sure to check your feet and ankles, armpits, groin and neck closely, as these are the places ticks are most likely to latch on. Bathe or shower within two hours of going inside, and put on clean clothes.

I have a tick bite. What should I do?

All tick bites are serious, and ticks should be removed as soon as possible. Don't use petroleum jelly, lighters or duct tape, as these methods can leave pieces of the tick in your skin. Instead, use tweezers to make sure the entire tick is removed. To remove a tick, follow these steps:

- Grasp the tick gently as close to the skin as possible. Grab the tick by the head, not the body.
- Begin pulling straight out. Do not jerk or twist the tick, as this could cause pieces to break off into the skin. Pull with constant, firm pressure until the tick is removed. If you can't remove the mouth easily with tweezers, leave it alone and let the skin heal.
- Once the tick is removed, wash the bite area with soap and warm water.
- Discuss the tick bite with your doctor and ask about being tested for Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases.

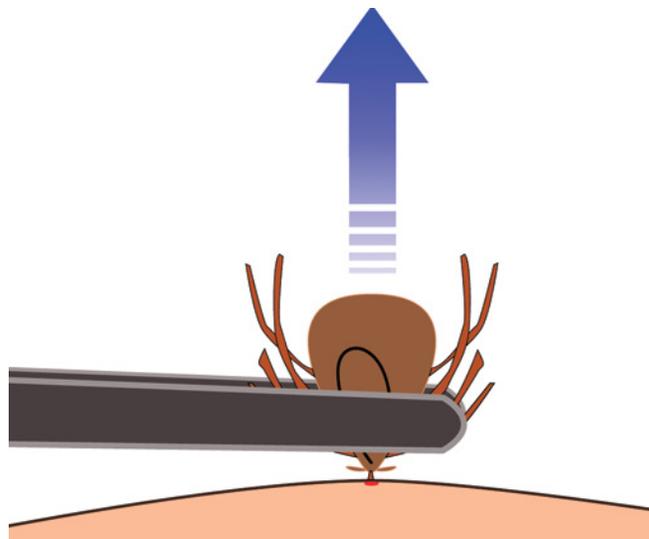


Image by Toby Amodeo

What about treatment?

If you test positive for Lyme disease, your doctor will most likely give you antibiotics. Lyme disease is harder to treat the longer the bacteria are in your body, and symptoms will get worse without treatment.

What about my kids?



Children are some of the most likely to get Lyme disease because they spend more time outdoors and with pets. Talk with your kids about staying safe outside, and be sure that pets are free of ticks.

Keep your lawn cut short, as ticks like to live in dense, long, moist grass. Rake leaves early, and have your kids check for ticks after they play outside. Help them stay safe by using insect repellent with at least 20 percent to 30 percent DEET.

For more information, visit CDC's Lyme disease Web page at www.cdc.gov/lyme