



Lyme Disease

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is caused by bacteria transmitted by the deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*). Lyme disease may cause symptoms affecting the skin, nervous system, heart and/or joints of an individual. More than 45,000 cases of Lyme disease have been reported in New York State since it first became reportable in 1986.

Who gets Lyme disease?

Lyme disease can affect people of any age. People who spend time in grassy and wooded environments are at increased risk of exposure. The chances of being bitten by a deer tick are greater during times of the year when ticks are most active. Young deer ticks, called nymphs, are active from mid-May to mid-August and are about the size of poppy seeds. Adult ticks, which are approximately the size of sesame seeds, are most active from March to mid-May and from mid-August to November. Both nymphs and adults can transmit Lyme disease. Ticks can be active any time temperatures are above freezing. Infected deer ticks can be found throughout New York State.

How is Lyme disease transmitted?

Not all deer ticks are infected with the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. Ticks become infected if they feed on small animals that are infected. The disease can be spread when an infected tick bites a person and stays attached for 36 hours or more before the bacteria can be transmitted. Lyme disease does not spread from one person to another. Transfer of the bacteria from an infected pregnant to the fetus is extremely rare.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

In 60 – 80 percent of cases, a rash resembling a bull's eye or solid patch, about two inches in diameter, appears and expands around the site of the bite. Multiple rashes might appear. Early symptoms of Lyme disease may include: chills and fever, headache, fatigue, stiff neck, muscle and/or joint pain and swollen glands. If Lyme disease goes undiagnosed and untreated in the early stage, more severe symptoms may result over time including: severe fatigue, stiff aching neck, tingling and numbness in the arms and legs or facial paralysis. The most severe symptoms of Lyme disease may not appear for weeks, months or even years after the tick bite. These may include severe headache, painful arthritis, swelling of the joints and heart and central nervous system problems.

When do symptoms appear?

Early symptoms appear within three days to 30 days after being bitten by an infected tick.

Does past infection with Lyme disease make a person immune?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection. A person can be reinfected if bitten by another infected tick.

What is the treatment for Lyme disease?

Early treatment of Lyme disease involves the administration of antibiotics and almost always results in a complete cure. The chances of a complete cure are reduced if treatment is delayed.

How can I prevent Lyme disease?

Take precautions to prevent tick bites. When in wooded or grassy areas wear light-colored clothing (for easy tick discovery) and tuck pants in socks and long-sleeved shirts into pants. Check every two to three hours of outdoor activity for ticks on clothing or skin. Brush ticks off of clothing before skin attachment occurs. Check body surface thoroughly for ticks after outside activity is complete. If attached ticks are properly removed before 36 hours, the risk of infection is minimal.

- Use insect repellants containing DEET according to label directions.
- Use repellants in small amounts and avoid repeated application.
- Do not apply repellants directly to a child's skin. Apply to your own hands and put it on the child.
- Avoid eyes, nose or mouth and use sparingly around ears.
- After returning indoors, wash treated areas with soap and water.

How should a tick be removed?

Grasp the tick with tweezers as close to the head and mouthparts where they attach to the skin. Be careful not to crush or squeeze the body of the tick which may contain infectious fluids. After removing the tick, disinfect the bite site with alcohol and wash hands. **Do not attempt to remove the tick by using petroleum jelly, lit cigarettes or other home remedies.** They may cause the tick to secrete fluids and actually increase the chance of contracting a tick-borne disease.

For additional information on Lyme disease or to learn about the tick identification services offered through the New York State Department of Health click on to the NYS Department of Health web site at www.health.state.ny.us