

Will You and Your Family be Outdoors this Summer? Here is a Guide for Preventing Lyme Disease

What Is Lyme Disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection caused by the bite of an infected deer tick. Untreated, the disease can cause health problems. Patients treated with antibiotics in the early stage of the infection usually recover rapidly and completely.

Where Is Lyme Disease Found?

In the United States, infected ticks can be found in the Northeast, including New York State; in the upper Midwest; and along the Northwest coast.

What Are the Symptoms of Lyme Disease?

The early symptoms of Lyme disease may be mild and easily missed. If you find a tick attached to your skin, remove the tick with tweezers, and watch for the symptoms of Lyme disease. In 60-80% of cases the first symptom is a rash that:

- Occurs at or near the site of the tick bite.
- Is a "bull's-eye" circular patch or solid red patch that grows larger.
- Appears between three days and one month after the tick bite.
- Has a diameter of two to six inches.
- Lasts for about three to five weeks.
- May or may not be warm to the touch.
- Is usually not painful or itchy.
- Sometimes leads to multiple rashes.

Ticks will attach themselves anywhere including the thighs, groin, trunk, armpits and behind the ears. If you are infected, the rash may be found in one of these areas. Around the time the rash appears, other symptoms, such as joint pain, chills, fever and fatigue can occur, but they may seem too mild to require medical attention. As Lyme disease progresses, severe fatigue, a stiff neck, tingling or numbness in the arms and legs, or facial paralysis can occur. The most severe symptoms of Lyme disease may not appear until weeks, months or years after the tick bite. These can include severe headaches, painful arthritis, swelling of the joints, and heart and central nervous system problems.

How Is Lyme Disease Diagnosed?

If you think you have Lyme disease, you should see your health care provider immediately. Early diagnosis of Lyme disease should be made based on symptoms and history of possible exposure to ticks. Blood tests may give false negative results if performed in the first month after the tick bite.

How Is Lyme Disease Treated?

Early treatment of Lyme disease involves antibiotics and almost always results in a full cure. However, the chances of a complete cure decrease if treatment is delayed. In a small number of cases, Lyme disease can become a chronic condition. However, some patients have reported slow improvement and even an end to symptoms, months or even years after treatment.

How Can I Protect Against Ticks and Prevent Lyme Disease?

Deer ticks live in shady, moist areas at ground level. They will cling to tall grass, brush and shrubs, usually no more than 18-24 inches off the ground. They also live in lawns and gardens, especially at the edges of woods and around old stone walls. Deer ticks cannot jump or fly, and do not drop onto passing people or animals. They get on humans and animals only by direct contact. Once a tick gets on the skin, it generally climbs upward until it reaches a protected area.

In tick-infested areas, your best protection is to avoid contact with soil, leaf litter and vegetation. However, if you garden, hike, camp, hunt, work or otherwise spend time in the outdoors, you can still protect yourself:

- Wear light-colored clothing with a tight weave to spot ticks easily.
- Wear enclosed shoes, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. Tuck pant legs into socks or boots and shirt into pants.
- Check clothes and any exposed skin frequently for ticks while outdoors.
- Consider using insect repellent.
- Stay on cleared, well-traveled trails. Walk in the center of trails. Avoid dense woods and bushy areas.
- Avoid sitting directly on the ground or on stone walls.
- Keep long hair tied back, especially when gardening.
- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after going indoors (preferably within two hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that may be on you.
- Do a final, full-body tick check at the end of the day (also check children and pets) and remove ticks promptly.

For photos of ticks, the use of insect repellent, how to safely remove a tick, and more information about ticks refer to the NYS Department of Health website:

<https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2813/>

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Susan MacLennan

Employee Program Associate

Governor's Office of Employee Relations

NYS Work-Life Services

Agency Building 2, 11th Floor, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223

(518) 402-3912 | (518) 275-2843 | susan.maclennan@goer.ny.gov

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