

# Lyme Disease

## Fact Sheet



Paul R. LePage, Governor

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

### What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is an illness caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*.

### How is Lyme disease spread?

Lyme disease is spread by the bite of an infected deer tick.

### Who gets Lyme disease?

People of all ages can get Lyme disease, but the following are the people at the highest risk:

- People who are commonly outdoors in areas where ticks are found (e.g. wooded areas, thick grass, overgrown bushes, and brush or leaf piles)
- Children under the age of 15 years old
- Adults over the age of 50 years old
- People who have other illnesses that make it hard for them to fight off infections

### What are some of the signs of Lyme disease?

It is important to recognize the early signs and symptoms of Lyme disease because it is easiest to treat when diagnosed in the early stages. Some of the early signs of Lyme disease include:

- A ring-like rash around the area of the tick bite. The rash could resemble a bull's eye with a clearing center and a distinct ring around it. Not everyone with Lyme disease gets a rash and not all rashes have a central clearing.
- Flu-like symptoms (e.g. fatigue, headache, fever and chills, muscle or joint soreness).

If a person is not treated early, they may develop late signs and symptoms of Lyme disease weeks, months or years after the tick bite. Late signs and symptoms of Lyme disease include:

- Arthritis usually in one or more large joints, especially the knees
- Neurological problems including numbness, pain, facial paralysis, and meningitis (fever, stiff neck and severe headaches)
- Memory and concentration problems
- Heart problems

### How soon do signs of Lyme disease appear?

Early symptoms of Lyme disease usually occur within the first month after the tick bite. Later symptoms may not appear for weeks, months, or years after a tick bite.

### How is Lyme disease diagnosed?

Diagnosis of Lyme disease is based on signs and symptoms, presence of characteristic rash, and history of exposure to deer ticks. A blood test may also be helpful to confirm diagnosis.

### What is the treatment for Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics. It is easiest to treat in the early stages of illness. If Lyme disease is found in later stages intravenous antibiotics may be given to the patient.

### Is there a vaccine for Lyme disease?

No, currently there is no vaccine for Lyme disease.

### If I've had Lyme disease in the past, can I get it again?

Yes, you can get Lyme disease again if you do not take proper steps to protect yourself from tick bites.

### Can I get Lyme disease from another person?

No, Lyme disease is not passed from person to person.

### How can I protect my family and myself from getting Lyme disease?

The best way to prevent Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses is to avoid contact with ticks. If you are working, playing, or relaxing in areas that may have ticks you should do the following:

- Wear long sleeve shirts and pants. Light colored clothing makes it easier to spot ticks.
- Tuck your pants into your socks and tuck your shirt into your pants.
- Use insect repellent (with DEET) on your skin and apply permethrin to your clothes. For more information on repellents, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/RepellentUpdates.htm>.
- Check your clothing and skin carefully after being outdoors and remove ticks immediately.

- If bitten by a tick, wash area of bite thoroughly with soap and water and apply an antiseptic to area of the bite.
- Mark on a calendar the date that you were bitten, and then watch for signs of Lyme disease or any changes in your health every day for the next month.
- Keep your lawn mowed, cut overgrown brush, and clear away leaf litter from your home.
- Inspect any pets daily and remove any ticks found.

### **How should I properly remove a tick?**

Using tweezers, grab the tick at its mouth and using firm steady pressure pull the tick out. Avoid crushing the tick's body because its bodily fluids may be harmful. Also, do not use petroleum jelly, hot matches, nail polish remover or any other substance to remove the tick. Using those items could increase the risk of infection.

### **Should I take antibiotics to prevent Lyme disease after being bitten by a tick?**

Use of antibiotics after a known tick bite is not routinely recommended, but may be considered under very specific circumstances (e.g. tick has been identified and has been attached for more than 24 hrs, antibiotics can be started within 72 hrs, and there is a high rate of infected ticks in the local area).

### **How long does a tick need to be attached to a person for that person to get Lyme disease?**

In general, ticks need to be attached for 24 to 48 hours before they can give you Lyme disease. However, just to be safe you should check your health closely for one month after a tick bite and call your doctor if you have any of the early signs of Lyme disease.

### **I'm pregnant and was recently infected with Lyme disease. How might this affect my pregnancy?**

Pregnant women should stay away from all ticks and areas where ticks are most likely to be found. Lyme disease can cause serious complications in pregnancy. Though it is rare, Lyme disease can be passed to an unborn child through the mother.

### **What can I do to protect my pets from getting Lyme disease?**

A Lyme disease vaccine is currently available for dogs. Contact your veterinarian for more information on vaccines and tick control products for pets.

### **Where is Lyme disease found in Maine?**

Lyme disease is found everywhere in the State of Maine. However, people should be especially careful when in the following areas:

- Wooded or forested areas
- Wild, unmaintained landscapes with high grass
- Brush or leaf piles

### **What time of the year should I be most concerned about Lyme disease?**

Most people get Lyme disease between the months of May and August, but ticks can be out anytime the temperature is above freezing.

### **How many people living in Maine die each year from Lyme disease?**

There have been no known deaths from Lyme disease in the State of Maine.

### **I was recently bitten by a tick and want to have it identified. Where should I send the tick?**

You can have a tick identified by sending it to the Maine Medical Center Research Institute (MMCRI) Vector-borne Disease Lab. For specific instructions on how to submit a tick please visit MMCRI's website at:

[www.mmcri.org/lyme/submit.html](http://www.mmcri.org/lyme/submit.html)

### **Can I have a tick tested for Lyme disease?**

MMCRI and the state lab in Augusta CANNOT test ticks for Lyme disease. Testing a tick that bit you is not going to tell you whether you have Lyme disease. Individuals who still wish to have a tick tested may do so at their own expense at a private laboratory.

### **Where can I get more information?**

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov>. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of health information.