

Lyme Disease General Information

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection transmitted by a certain species of ticks known as the blacklegged tick, sometimes called the deer tick. Ticks, seen mostly in summer months, are small insects that will stick to the skin and feed on the blood of animals, including humans. The tick is brown or black and may be as small as the period at the end of this sentence. Before feeding they can be three to five millimetres in length.

The Lyme disease bacteria can be carried by mice, squirrels, birds and other small animals. It can be passed to humans when ticks feed on infected animals or birds and become infected and then bite people.

The risk of Lyme disease is usually low. It takes more than 24-36 hours for the tick to transmit the disease. Removing the tick as soon as possible may help to stop the spread of Lyme disease into the body.

Use tweezers or your fingers to grasp the body of the tick and remove it gently. After tick removal, wash the area and your hands thoroughly.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Erythema Migrans (EM) rash (may look like a bull's-eye target) appears on 70-80% of infected people from 1 to 30 days after extended contact with a tick (i.e. attached for over 24 hours)
- fever, chills
- headache
- tiredness, fatigue
- stiff neck or soreness all over
- pain or swelling in the joints
- swollen lymph nodes

What is the treatment?

Early antibiotic treatment prescribed by your doctor is the best way to prevent serious illness. If not treated early, the infection could progress and cause chronic arthritis, cardiac abnormalities, etc.

How can you prevent Lyme disease?

- Avoid tick-infested areas when possible. Walk on well-travelled paths. Avoid areas with high grass.
- Wear light-coloured, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt in tick-infested areas and tuck pants into socks.

- Cover arms, legs and other exposed areas of the body.
- Wear shoes that cover your entire foot.
- Check frequently for ticks on the skin, especially children.
- Use insect repellent containing DEET or Icaridin when in tick-infested areas.
- Remove ticks from skin as soon as possible.
- See a healthcare provider if symptoms of Lyme disease are noted.
- Use landscaping techniques to reduce the number of ticks around yards.
- Check out the Department of Health and Wellness website at: novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/lyme.asp
- Check out the Public Health Agency of Canada website at: phac-aspc.gc.ca/id-mi/lyme-eng.php