

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is an illness that is spread by infected ticks. It may affect the skin, nervous system, heart and joints. Lyme disease is mainly found in the eastern United States and the upper Midwest. Most cases occur in June and July.

Who gets Lyme disease?

Anyone can get Lyme disease, especially if they spend long amounts of time outdoors in areas where infected ticks are found.

How is Lyme disease spread?

People get Lyme disease from a tick bite. Persons who are bitten by a tick but do not remove the tick immediately have a higher chance of getting Lyme disease. Some people become ill after crushing a tick with their hands because its body fluids get into cuts or scratches in the skin. Lyme disease can not be spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

The illness usually starts as a large circular red rash at or near the site of the tick bite. The rash may increase in size and can eventually look like a "bull's eye" with a clear center. The rash is frequently not identified. Along with the rash, other "flu-like" symptoms such as fever, headache, fatigue, stiff neck, muscle and joint pain may be present. These can last for several weeks. Swelling and pain in the large joints may come and go for many years. If left untreated, further symptoms can develop within a few weeks to months after the rash occurs.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The rash or flu-like symptoms usually begin within a month after the tick bite.

What is the treatment for Lyme disease?

Antibiotics. Tetracycline, doxycycline, and penicillin are all used (but only penicillin is used in children under the age of 7 years).

Can a person get Lyme disease more than once?

Yes. One infection with Lyme disease does not protect a person from getting it again.

How should a tick be removed?

All ticks should be removed as soon as possible. The best way is to use tweezers to grab the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull it straight out. Do not use a twisting motion as it may leave part of the tick embedded. Do not squeeze the tick's body when removing it. Do not handle ticks with bare hands. Wash your hands after removing a tick. You may want to apply an antiseptic on the bite.

How can Lyme disease be prevented?

1. Do not walk barelegged in tall grass or woods where ticks may be found.
2. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and high socks. Tuck pants legs into socks. Wear light-colored clothing so crawling ticks can be seen more easily.
3. Conduct "tick checks" every two to three hours if spending a lot of time outdoors. Check all of your skin (you may need help to do this) for ticks every day you spend in areas with lots of ticks. The ticks are most often found on the thigh, arms, underarms, and legs. Ticks can be very small, so look for new "freckles."
4. Use tick repellents containing the ingredients DEET for skin applications, bearing in mind that lower concentrations should be used on children, reapplying more often. Use Permethrin (on clothing). Always follow the directions on the can. These repellents can be found at the local drugstore. Wash off all repellents after going indoors.
5. Remove any attached ticks immediately, using the method above.