

Lyme Disease Fact Sheet

How can I avoid Lyme disease?

Avoid possible tick habitats.

- If walking or hiking in the woods, stay on well-traveled paths or trails.
- Mid-May through mid-July is the peak time of year for black-legged ticks; however they are also out earlier in the spring and again in the fall.
- Keep children's swing-sets in a sunny and dry area of the yard, away from woods, brush and shade.

Use a good tick repellent.

- Permethrin
 - This is especially recommended for people who spend extended periods of time in tick habitat.
 - Permethrin products are available in stores that sell camping and hunting supplies, or outdoor gear.
 - Do not use permethrin on your skin.
- DEET-based products are another option.
 - Use a product containing no more than 30 percent DEET for adults and children.
 - Do not use DEET for infants under two months of age.
 - Follow the manufacturer's directions for repellent applications.
 - Alternative repellents to DEET or permethrin are not generally as effective in preventing tick bites.

Wear clothing that will help shield you from ticks.

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Tuck your pants into the top of your socks or boots, to create a "tick barrier."
- It may be easier to spot ticks if you are wearing light-colored clothes.

Find and remove ticks.

- Check yourself, your children and pets for ticks after spending time outdoors.
- Ticks have to remain attached for one to two days before they can transmit the Lyme disease bacteria.
- If you find a tick on yourself or your child, remove the tick promptly by pulling upward in a slow but firm manner.
- You can use your fingers or fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick by the head.
- Avoid remedies like Vaseline®, nail polish remover, or burning matches, these are not a safe or effective way to remove ticks.

How do I know if I should see my doctor after being bitten by a tick?

The risk of getting a tick-borne disease is small, especially if the tick is removed within 24 hours of attachment.

Monitor the area surrounding the bite for about a month to watch for an early sign of Lyme disease, an expanding rash that often appears as a red ring with central clearing, or a "bull's-eye" appearance.

- The rash begins as a small red area that may expand to several inches or more in diameter.
- A rash may appear on one or more places on the body, may include one or more rashes, and is usually not painful or itchy.
- It is common to develop an area of inflammation and itching up to the size of a quarter right after being bitten by a tick. This is due to your body's reaction to the tick's saliva and is not a symptom of Lyme disease.
- However, if you have been bitten by an infected tick, an expanding rash will appear within a few days and typically will be larger than two inches across. It does not always have a "bull's eye" appearance and may look like a large circle that is red throughout.

Not everyone develops or notices the rash, so it's also important to be alert for other possible symptoms of Lyme disease - fever, headache, chills, fatigue, sore throat, a stiff neck, and pain in the muscles or joints - if you've spent time in an area with tick habitat during the past month.

Other tick-borne diseases can cause similar symptoms.

What is the treatment following a tick bite?

In some circumstances, a short (1-day) antibiotic treatment soon after a tick bite might prevent the development of Lyme disease. Several criteria must be met:

- The tick must be identified as the blacklegged tick (deer tick)
- The tick must have been attached for at least 36 hours (if it is engorged -- puffed up with blood -- then it was probably on this long).
- The local infection rate in the blacklegged ticks must be at least 20%. This is likely the case for much of Minnesota, but call MDH (651-201-5414) if you have any questions.
- The treatment must be started within 72 hours (3 days) of finding the attached tick on yourself.
- The treatment is only for adults and children 8 years or older.

Talk to your doctor about the single dose antibiotic treatment if you meet these criteria. You can also take a "wait and see" approach and watch for signs and symptoms of Lyme disease. Prompt treatment of the disease is very effective and will prevent more severe signs and symptoms.

Is there a vaccine for Lyme disease?

No. There was a vaccine, but the manufacturer pulled it off the market citing poor sales. We do not expect any other Lyme disease vaccines in the near future. A vaccine against Lyme disease would not protect against other tick-borne diseases.

If I've had Lyme disease in the past, am I immune from getting it again?

No. Contracting Lyme disease once does not mean you are protected from getting it again. There are individuals who have had Lyme disease more than once.

What is the likelihood of having complications after finishing treatment for Lyme disease?

- Most people have a complete resolution of their symptoms after treatment. A small percentage of patients (especially those diagnosed in the later stages of the disease) have persistent complaints after treatment. In that instance, our doctor will help you determine whether further treatment is necessary.

What can be done to control tick populations?

- Keep lawns mowed, brush trimmed, and leaf litter moved away from the home.
- Keep trails or paths in wooded areas on your property clear of vegetation.
- Make a landscape barrier (such as a three foot wide border of wood chips) between your lawn and the woods.

