



LYME DISEASE Q&A

(updated April 2008)

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is caused by a bacterial infection transmitted by the bite of a blacklegged tick. Lyme disease may cause symptoms affecting the skin, nervous system, heart and/or joints of an individual.

Who gets Lyme disease?

Males and females of all ages can get Lyme disease. People who spend time outdoors in tick-infested environments are at an increased risk of exposure. Most cases report an exposure to ticks or their woodland/brush habitat during June, July, and August, but cases have been reported during every month of the year. Travel to Lyme hyper-endemic areas of the United States like the Northeast, upper Midwest, and parts of California can increase risk of exposure to Lyme disease and blacklegged ticks.

How is Lyme disease spread?

The bacterium that causes Lyme disease is part of a natural cycle of the blacklegged tick feeding on animals such as mice, opossums, dogs, and deer. If an infected tick feeds on humans, it can transmit the infection to them. Person-to-person spread of Lyme disease does not occur.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

The illness usually occurs during the summer months and generally starts as a large circular reddish rash, which expands around or near the site of the tick bite. Multiple rash sites may occur. During the rash stage, or occasionally prior to the rash, other symptoms such as fever, headache, fatigue, stiff neck, muscle and/or joint pain may be present which may last for several weeks. If left untreated, within a few weeks to months after the onset of rash, complications such as meningitis, facial palsy, or heart abnormalities may occur. Swelling and pain in the large joints may recur over many years.

How soon do symptoms occur?

Symptoms usually begin within a month of exposure.

What is the treatment for Lyme disease?

Current therapy includes the use of antibiotics.

What can be done to prevent the spread of Lyme disease?

Limiting exposure to ticks is the best way to prevent tickborne disease. When spending time outdoors in places where contact with ticks may occur, take the following precautions:

- Wear light-colored clothing so that crawling ticks can be easily seen.
- Wear pants and long sleeves to reduce skin exposure to ticks.
- Tuck pants into socks and shirts into pants to prevent ticks from crawling up pants legs.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin, and permethrin to clothing.
- After spending time outdoors, thoroughly inspect your body for crawling or attached ticks.



How should a tick be removed?

To remove an attached tick, grasp with fine-tipped tweezers as close to the skin surface as possible, and pull upward and out with a firm, steady pressure. If tweezers are not available, use fingers shielded with tissue paper or rubber gloves. Do not handle with bare hands. Do not use petroleum jelly, fire, or other home remedies; these methods may actually increase the risk of infection. Be careful not to squeeze, crush, or puncture the tick's body, which may contain infectious fluids. After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite area and wash hands. Consult with a physician if there is concern about incomplete tick removal.

Where can I get additional information on Lyme disease?

Contact the Georgia Division of Public Health, Epidemiology Section, by email at gaepinfo@ehr.state.ga.us, or see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Lyme Disease website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/lyme/index.htm>.