



Lyme Disease Fact Sheet

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi* which is transmitted to humans by infected ticks. It may affect the skin, nervous system, heart and joints. Lyme disease is mainly found in the eastern United States. Most cases occur in June and July. Very few people in Oklahoma get Lyme disease.

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 cannot be spread from person to person. When acquired during pregnancy, no negative effects on the fetus have been found when the mother receives appropriate antibiotic treatment. There are no reports of Lyme disease transmission from breast milk.

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

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size and can eventually look like a “bull’s eye” with a clear center. Along with the rash, “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 3 days to a month after the tick bite. Other symptoms, such as neck stiffness, nerve pain, and shooting pains may begin days to months after the tick bite.

What is the treatment for Lyme disease?

People treated with appropriate antibiotics in the early stages of Lyme disease usually recover rapidly and completely. Antibiotics commonly used for oral treatment include doxycycline, amoxicillin, or cefuroxime axetil.

Can a person get Lyme disease more than once?

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

How should a tick be removed?

Any tick should be removed as soon as possible. The best way is to use tweezers to grab the tick as close to the skin

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as possible and pull it straight out. 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. After removing, drown the tick in alcohol or kerosene and keep it in case illness occurs so you can show it to your doctor.

How can Lyme disease be prevented?

- Don't walk barelegged in tall grass or woods where ticks may be found.
- 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.
- Conduct "tick checks" every two to three hours if spending a lot of time outdoors. Check all of your skin for ticks every day (you may need help to do this). The ticks are most often found on the thigh, arms, under arms, and legs. Ticks are very small, so look for new "freckles."
- Use tick repellents containing the ingredients DEET for skin applications (which can be toxic to infants if a large amount is applied) or Permethrin (on clothing). Always follow the directions on the label. These repellents can be found at the local drugstore. Wash off all repellents after going indoors.

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- Remove any attached ticks immediately, using the method above.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
(405) 425-4437*

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