

Lyme Disease Fact Sheet

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a tick-borne illness caused by infection with the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*.

Who can get Lyme disease?

Anyone can get Lyme disease if they spend time in or near forested areas where ticks are found. The most frequently infected people include children in the 5 to 10 year age range, and adults in the 40-60 year age range.

How is Lyme disease spread?

In Virginia, only the blacklegged tick (a.k.a. the “deer tick”) carries and transmits Lyme disease. Ticks become infected with the Lyme disease agent by feeding on infected forest rodents such as white footed mice. Transmission to people by infected ticks is most common during the late spring and early summer months. Blacklegged ticks can also transmit Lyme disease during the fall and winter months. The Lyme disease agent cannot be transmitted unless an infected tick has been attached and feeding on a person’s body for at least 36 hours. Lyme disease is not known to be spread to humans from other insects or animals, or from person to person.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

Within days to weeks following an infectious tick bite, most patients develop a red rash called an erythema migrans (a.k.a., “EM” or “bull’s-eye” rash) around the bite site. This rash slowly expands (up to 12 inches in diameter) and may clear around the center, but does not itch or hurt. It is usually accompanied by general tiredness, fever, headache, muscle aches, and joint pains. If untreated or improperly treated in the early stage, some patients develop later manifestations of the disease which can include severe arthritis and swelling of the large joints (mostly knees), neurological problems, and/or heart problems weeks to many months later.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The EM rash may appear within 3-30 days (usually 1-2 weeks) after exposure. As the EM rash causes no sensation (itching or pain), it may not be noticed. Some infected individuals may have few early symptoms of Lyme disease, but develop the more severe symptoms associated with later Lyme disease stages weeks to months after exposure.

How is Lyme disease diagnosed?

The diagnosis of Lyme disease is based primarily on signs and symptoms of illness. Tests for Lyme disease may be done on a patient’s blood to help confirm the diagnosis.

What should I do if I think I have Lyme disease?

You should contact your healthcare provider.

Is there a vaccine for Lyme disease?

There is currently no vaccine for Lyme disease.

How can Lyme disease be prevented?

Recognize potential tick infested areas, such as leaf litter, tall grass and vegetation in forests and along forest margins. When in potential tick habitats, tuck pant legs into socks and shirts into pants to prevent ticks from crawling up under the pants or shirt. Wear long-sleeved shirts buttoned at the wrists. Use tick-specific repellants. The most effective repellent products for use on skin contain DEET [up to 50% DEET for adults, and 30% for children]. Repellent products containing permethrin are also highly effective, but may only be applied to shoes and clothing and not to skin. Be sure to carefully follow the label's instructions when using any repellent product. Wear light colored clothing so that ticks are easier to see and remove. Conduct tick checks on yourself and your children within a few hours of exposure to tick infested areas. Remove any attached ticks promptly by gripping the tick's head with tweezers as close to the skin as possible and using a gentle steady pulling action.

Where can I get more information about Lyme disease?

More information about Lyme disease is available on the Virginia Department of Health website at: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/tickbrochure> or at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/lyme/ld_humandisease_treatment.htm.