



Frequently Asked Questions about Lyme Disease

Q1) What is Lyme disease?

A) Lyme disease is a tick-borne illness caused by a bacterium.

Q2) How is Lyme disease spread?

A) Lyme disease is spread by the bite of a deer tick that already has the germ.

Q3) Who gets Lyme disease?

A) Anyone can get Lyme disease, but the following are groups who get it most often:

- People who are commonly outdoors in areas where ticks are found. (E.g. wooded areas, thick grass, overgrown bushes, brush or leaf piles)
- Children under the age of 15
- Adults over the age of 50
- People who have other illnesses that make it hard for them to fight off germs

Q4) What are some of the signs of Lyme disease?

A) Some of the early signs of Lyme disease include the following:

- A ring-like rash around the area of the tick bite – the rash could resemble a bull's eye with a clearing center and distinct ring around it
- Flu-like symptoms (E.g. fatigue, headache, fever, muscle or joint soreness)

Late stage signs of Lyme disease include the following:

- Arthritis
- Neurological (nerves) problems
- Cardiovascular (heart) problems

Q5) How soon do signs of Lyme disease appear?

A) Early signs of Lyme disease usually occur within the first month after the tick bite. Later symptoms would occur several weeks to several months later.

Q6) I was recently bitten by a tick, removed it, and now want to have it identified. Where should I send the tick?

A) You can have a tick identified by sending it to the Maine Medical Center Lyme Research Lab. For specific instructions on how to submit a tick please go to the Maine Medical Center Lyme Research Lab website at www.mmcri.org/lyme/submit.html

Q7) Where do I send my tick to have it tested for Lyme disease?

A) The Maine Medical Center's Lyme Disease Research Lab only identifies ticks; they DO NOT test ticks for Lyme disease. The state lab in Augusta also does NOT test ticks for Lyme disease. Testing for a tick that bit you is not going to tell you whether you have Lyme disease. Individuals who still wish to have a tick tested may do so at their own expense at a private laboratory.

Q8) How is Lyme disease diagnosed?

A) If you think that you might have Lyme disease you should make an appointment to visit your doctor.

Q9) What is the treatment for Lyme disease?

A) Lyme disease can be easily treated if it is detected in the early stages. In its early stages Lyme disease is treated with oral antibiotics. If Lyme disease is found in later stages, intravenous antibiotics may be given to the patient.

Q10) How should I properly remove a tick?

A) Using tweezers, you should grab the tick at its mouth and using firm, steady pressure, pull the tick out. Do not yank or squish the tick because it may have harmful bodily fluids. Also, do not use petroleum jelly, hot matches, nail polish remover, or any other substance to remove the tick. Using those items could increase the risk of infection.

Q11) Where in the state is Lyme disease found?

A) Lyme disease is found everywhere in Maine. However, people should be especially careful in the following areas:

- Wooded or forested areas
- Around wild, unmaintained landscapes with high grass
- Brush or leaf piles

Q12) I'm pregnant and was recently infected with Lyme disease. How might this affect my pregnancy and how might my fetus be affected?

A) Pregnant women should stay away from all ticks and areas where ticks are most likely to be found. Lyme disease can be given to an unborn child, although it is rare. It can also cause the mother to miscarry her child or deliver a stillborn child.

Q13) Is there a vaccine for Lyme disease?

A) No, currently there is no vaccine for Lyme disease.

Q14) Can I get Lyme disease again after being successfully treated for it in the past?

A) Yes, you can get Lyme disease again if you do not take proper steps to protect yourself. You must use repellents and wear appropriate clothing to make sure you do not get bitten by ticks.

Q15) Can I get Lyme disease from another person?

A) No. Lyme disease is not passed from person to person.

Q16) What time of the year should I be most concerned about Lyme disease?

A) Most people get Lyme disease between the months of May and August.

Q17) How many people living in Maine die each year from Lyme disease?

A) There have been no known deaths from Lyme disease in the State of Maine.

Q18) How can I protect my family and myself from getting Lyme disease?

A) To prevent Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses, the best protection is to avoid contact with ticks. If you are working, playing, or relaxing in areas that may have ticks you should do the following:

- Wear light colored clothing (spot ticks easier) with long sleeve shirts and pants
- Create an extra "no tick" zone by tucking your pants into your socks and your shirt into your pants
- Use insect repellent with DEET on your skin and apply permethrin to your clothes.
- Check your clothing and skin carefully after being outdoors in tick-infested areas and remove ticks promptly
- Wash areas of any possible tick bites thoroughly with soap and water, and apply an antiseptic to the area of the bite
- Mark on a calendar the date that you were bitten, then watch yourself for signs of Lyme disease or any changes in your personal health every day for the next month
- Keep your lawn mowed, cut overgrown brush, and clear away leaf litter from your home
- Inspect any pets daily and remove any ticks found

Q19) Are DEET and permethrin safe?

A) According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) Committee on Environmental Health updated their recommendation for use of DEET products on children in 2003, citing: "Insect repellents containing DEET with a concentration of 10% appear to be as safe as products with a concentration of 30% when used according to the directions on the product labels." AAP recommends that repellents with DEET should not be used on infants less than 2 months old.

Permethrin is highly effective as an insecticide and as a repellent. Permethrin-treated clothing repels and kills ticks and mosquitoes, and retains this effect after repeated laundering. The permethrin insecticide should be reapplied following the label instructions. Some commercial products are available pretreated with permethrin. (This information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Q20) Should I take antibiotics to prevent Lyme disease after being bitten by a tick?

A) Use of antibiotics after a known tick bite is not routinely recommended. If you were bitten in an area that is known to have Lyme disease you should look for the early signs of Lyme disease such as fever, rash, and fatigue, and contact your doctor for advice on what to do next.

Q21) How long does a tick need to be attached to a person for that person to get Lyme disease?

A) If a tick is attached to your skin for less than 24 hours, your chance of getting Lyme disease is very small. In general, ticks need to be attached for 24 to 48 hours before they can give you Lyme disease. However, just to be safe you should check your health closely for one month after a tick bite and call your doctor if you have any of the early signs of Lyme disease.

Q22) What can I do to protect my pets from getting Lyme disease?

A) Domestic animals that have contact with the outdoors are at a high risk of getting Lyme disease. Because of this, it is important that pet owners regularly bring their pets to a vet. The vet will advise you on tick control products that will help prevent ticks from attaching to your pet.

