

Happy & Healthy Pediatrics

Pediatric, Adolescent, & Breastfeeding Medicine



Lyme Disease and Tick bites

With all of the media coming out right now about tick borne illness, we wanted to send you an email to clarify a few things and to teach you some good prevention techniques.

- A. Bugs are just gross.
- B. We hate the idea of our kids being a host to another living creature!

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is an infection caused by a bacteria called a spirochete. The disease is spread to humans by the bites of deer ticks infected with this bacteria. Deer ticks are tiny black-brown creatures, the size of a sesame seed. They live in forests or grassy, wooded, marshy areas near rivers, lakes, or oceans. Many people who have been infected with Lyme disease were bitten by deer ticks while hiking or camping, during other outdoor activities, or even while spending time in their own backyards, from the late spring to early fall (only in areas where deer are present).

Where is Lyme disease most common?

Deer ticks that are infected with Lyme disease live in areas that have very low and high seasonal temperatures and high humidity. In the United States, almost all cases of Lyme disease occur in the following regions:

- **Northeast** (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont)
- **North central states** (Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin)
- **West Coast**(California)

How will I know if my child has Lyme disease?

The first and most obvious symptom of Lyme disease is a localized rash that begins as a pink or red circle that expands over time and may become several inches or larger. It may appear from 3 to 30 days after the bite occurred. Some people may have a single circle, while others may have many. Most people who

develop the rash won't feel anything, but for others the rash may hurt, itch, burn, or feel warm to the touch. The rash most commonly appears on the head, neck, groin, thighs, trunk, and armpits.

A rash may occur without any other symptoms or may include

- Headache
- Chills
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Swollen glands, usually in the neck or groin
- Aches and pains in the muscles or joints

If your child develops the rash with or without any of these symptoms, call us.

How is Lyme disease treated?

Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics (usually penicillin, a cephalosporin, or a tetracycline) prescribed by your pediatrician. The antibiotics are usually taken by mouth, but also can be given intravenously (directly into the bloodstream through a vein) in more severe cases. Both early and late stages of the disease can be treated with antibiotics. We do not provide antibiotics for prevention of Lyme disease after a tick bite.

How can I prevent Lyme disease?

If you live or work in a region where Lyme disease is a problem, or if you visit such an area, the following are ways to protect your family from the ticks that carry the disease:

- **Avoid places where ticks live.** Whenever possible, avoid shaded, moist areas likely to be infested with ticks.
- **Cover arms and legs.** Have your child wear a long-sleeved shirt and tuck his pants into his socks.
- **Wear a hat** to help keep ticks away from the scalp. Keep long hair pulled back.
- **Wear light-colored clothing** to make it easier to spot ticks.
- **Wear enclosed shoes or boots.** Avoid wearing sandals in an area where ticks may live.
- **Use insect repellent.** We recommend **Natrapel**.
- **Stay on cleared trails whenever possible.** Avoid wandering from a trail or brushing against overhanging branches or shrubs.
- **After coming indoors, check for ticks.** This will only take a couple of minutes. Ticks often hide behind the ears or along the hairline. It usually takes more than 36 hours for a person to become infected with the bacteria, so removing any ticks soon after they have attached themselves is very effective for reducing the chances of becoming infected.

Keep in mind, ticks can be found right in your own backyard, depending on where you live. Keeping your yard clear of leaves, brush, and tall grass may reduce the number of ticks. Ask a licensed professional pest control expert about other steps you can take to reduce ticks in your yard.

Ticks and how to remove them

Ticks do not fly, jump, or drop from trees. They hide in long grass and small trees, bushes, or shrubs waiting for an animal or person to brush by. Then they attach themselves to the animal or person's skin. When a tick is found on a person or pet, try to remove as much of it as possible using the following steps:

1. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible with fine-tipped tweezers. Be careful not to squeeze the tick's body.
2. Slowly pull the tick away from the skin.
3. After the tick is out, clean the bitten area with soap and water and apply first aid ointment (bacitracin).

Save us the bugs!

Please put the tick in a container and bring to us. We can send it to the lab to determine if the tick is even a deer tick. If it is a different type of tick, then we don't have to worry since only deer ticks carry Lyme disease. If it is a deer tick, the lab will determine if the tick is carrying Lyme or not. If not, no further intervention needed.

What if you don't have the bug:

Then bloodwork should be drawn on the child 2 weeks after the exposure. Sooner can cause false negative results. No antibiotics are recommended in children for prevention of Lyme disease after a tick bite. In addition, the tick must be attached and feeding from the child for 36-72 hours to even allow Lyme to be transmitted.