

Everything you need to know about Lyme disease

April 23 2019, by Len Canter, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—With growing concern about mosquito-borne viruses such

as Zika, it's easy to let down your guard when it comes to ticks. But Lyme disease is still a danger, especially in the Northeast and upper Midwest. In fact, it has affected people in almost every state.

Lyme disease is spread through the bite of an infected [tick](#). Ticks can attach anywhere on the body, often in hard-to-see areas like groin folds and underarms. Checking for ticks after every walk in wooded and [grassy areas](#) helps, but most people are infected by immature ticks, less than 2 millimeters in size and very hard to see.

Immature ticks feed during the spring and [summer months](#). Adult ticks are most active during cooler months of the year. They're larger and easier to spot and remove before they've had time to infect you. In most cases, a tick must be attached for 36 to 48 hours to transmit the disease.

Since it's not always possible to spot an attached tick, be aware of common Lyme symptoms and see your doctor right away if you suspect infection. Untreated, Lyme disease can progress to severe arthritis and neurological problems.

Signs and Symptoms

- **3 to 30 days after a bite:** An expanding rash, starting at the bite site, that often looks like a big red bullseye; flu-like fever, chills, headache, fatigue and body aches; as well as swollen lymph nodes.
- **Days to months after a bite:** Severe headaches and neck stiffness; additional rashes; arthritis with [severe joint pain](#) and swelling; heart palpitations, dizziness or shortness of breath; shooting pains, numbness or tingling in the hands or feet.

Antibiotics can usually cure Lyme. If you discovered the tick early on, you may be a candidate for [preventive treatment](#) with a single dose of

doxycycline before any symptoms appear.

Preventive treatment is possible in counties or states where Lyme disease is common, provided the tick is properly identified (save to show to the doctor) and was attached for less than 36 hours, often based on how engorged it was when you found it. Treatment can be started within 72 hours of tick removal—provided you aren't pregnant, breastfeeding or allergic to the medication.

Of course, preventing a bite is the best protection. Tests done by *Consumer Reports* found that many insect repellents with DEET or picaridin are effective. Of the so-called natural agents like lemon oil and eucalyptus, only the Repel brand worked well. To sidestep ticks, walk in the sun—[ticks](#) like shady areas with hiding places like tall grasses and leaf piles. Wear light-colored clothes and long pants and long sleeves. Tuck your shirt into your pants and your pants into your socks.

Ticks can spread many dangerous diseases besides Lyme so it's important for you, your children and your pets to avoid them.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [Lyme disease](#) and other tick-borne illnesses.

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Citation: Everything you need to know about Lyme disease (2019, April 23) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-04-lyme-disease.html>

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