

What is Lyme disease and where does it occur?

- Lyme disease is an illness caused by the bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is spread through the bite of certain types of infected ticks.
- It can cause serious illness in humans but can be effectively treated with antibiotics.
- Cases have been reported in parts of Europe, Asia and throughout much of North America.
- In British Columbia, the western blacklegged tick transmits Lyme disease while, in other parts of Canada, the disease is spread by the blacklegged tick, sometimes called the deer tick.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

- The first sign of infection is usually a circular rash called *erythema migrans*, or EM. This occurs in 70-80% of infected individuals and begins at the site of the tick bite, within three days to one month after the bite.
- Other common symptoms include fatigue, chills, fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, and swollen lymph nodes.
- If untreated, the second stage of the disease can last up to several months. The symptoms during this stage include central and peripheral nervous system disorders, multiple skin rashes, arthritis and arthritic symptoms, heart palpitations, extreme fatigue, and general weakness.

How do people get Lyme disease?

- Lyme disease is normally carried in the blood of mice, squirrels, birds and other small animals. It is transmitted to ticks when they feed on infected animals and then to humans through the bites of the infected ticks.
- It is not transmitted directly from person-to-person by touching or kissing.
- Although dogs and cats can get Lyme disease, they cannot transmit the infection directly to humans. Pets can, however, carry infected ticks into your home or yard.
- Deer hunting may increase exposure to ticks when tracking through high grass, shrubs and brush areas. Lyme disease cannot be contracted from eating deer meat.

What can I do to protect myself?

- In areas where ticks are found, individuals should know about the risk of Lyme disease and take measures to protect themselves:
 - Use bug repellent containing DEET or Icaridin if you venture into forests or overgrown areas.
 - Wear protective clothing to limit the access of ticks to your skin. This clothing should include enclosed shoes, long-sleeved shirts that fit tightly around the wrist, and long-legged pants tucked into socks or boots. Light coloured clothing helps you to spot ticks.
 - Always check for ticks on clothing and skin after being in tick-infested areas. A daily total-body inspection for ticks on your children, pets and yourself, plus removing attached ticks promptly—within 24 to 36 hours—usually prevents infection.

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- Remove tick using clean tweezers, grasping the head as close to the skin as possible, and slowly pull it straight out. If mouthparts break off and remain in the skin, remove them with tweezers, but if you are unable to remove them easily, it is fine; just leave them and let the skin heal.
- Afterwards, cleanse the area with soap and water, or disinfect with rubbing alcohol or hand sanitizer.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed on page one, within 32 days after a tick bite, see your health care provider.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Heymann, D. L., 2008. Control of Communicable Diseases Manual (19th Ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.
- Public Health Agency of Canada. 2015 / 2016. Government of Canada. Lyme disease.

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