

Lyme Disease Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How can I prevent myself from getting Lyme disease?

- Avoid possible tick habitats during the peak time of year (generally mid-May through mid-July). Blacklegged ticks (also known as deer ticks or bear ticks) are found in wooded, brushy areas. Unless you spend time in that kind of setting, simply being in a high-risk county won't place you at risk.
 - If walking or hiking in the woods, stay on well-traveled paths or trails.
 - Besides mid-May through mid-July, some blacklegged ticks are also out earlier in the spring and again in the fall.
- Use a good tick repellent.
 - Products containing permethrin, which are used on clothing, are especially recommended for people who will be spending an extended period of time in possible tick habitat.
 - Permethrin products are marketed under names like Permanone® and Duranon® and are available in stores that sell camping and hunting supplies, or other outdoor gear.
 - Do not use permethrin on your skin.
 - Standard DEET-based products are another option.
 - Use a product containing no more than 30 percent DEET for adults.
 - The American Academy of Pediatrics now reports that concentrations up to 30% are also safe for children.
 - Do not use DEET for infants under two months of age.
 - Follow the manufacturer's directions for repellent applications.
 - Alternative repellents to DEET or permethrin are not generally as effective in preventing tick bites.
- Wear clothes that will help to shield you from ticks.
 - Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
 - Tuck your pants into the top of your socks or boots, to create a "tick barrier."
 - It may be easier to spot ticks if you are wearing light-colored clothes.
- Check frequently for ticks, and remove them promptly.
 - Ticks actually have to bite you and remain attached for one to two days before they can transmit the Lyme disease bacteria.
 - Some research suggests that human anaplasmosis (another tick-borne disease) may be transmitted more quickly, in 12-24 hours.
 - Parents should check children for ticks.
- If you find a tick on yourself, remove the tick promptly by pulling in a slow but firm manner.
 - If possible, use a pair of tweezers or specially designed tick forceps to grasp the tick by the head.
 - Avoid folk remedies like Vaseline®, nail polish remover, or burning matches - they are not a safe or effective way to remove ticks.
- Routinely check your pets for ticks.
- Keep children's play-sets or swing-sets in a sunny and dry area of the yard, away from woods, brush and shade.

How do I know if I should see my doctor after being bitten by a tick?

- The risk of getting a tick-borne disease is small, especially if the tick is removed soon after it becomes attached.
- Monitor the area surrounding your bite for about a month, to watch for the expanding rash that often occurs in Lyme disease.
- An early sign of Lyme disease is the characteristic expanding rash that often appears as a red ring with central clearing, or a "bull's-eye" appearance.
 - The rash begins as a small red area that may expand to several inches or more in diameter.
 - A rash may appear on one or more places on the body, may include one or more rashes, and is usually not painful or itchy.
 - It is common to develop an area of inflammation and itching up to the size of a quarter right after being bitten by a tick. This is due to your body's reaction to the tick's saliva and is not a symptom of Lyme disease.
 - However, if you have been bitten by an infected tick, the expanding rash will reappear a few days later and typically will be larger than two inches across. It does not always have a "bull's eye" appearance and may look like a big red circle that is red throughout.



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- Not everyone develops or notices the rash, however, so it's also important to be alert for other possible symptoms of Lyme disease - fever, headache, chills, fatigue, sore throat, a stiff neck, and pain in the muscles or joints - if you've spent time in "tick country" during the past month.
- Other tick-borne diseases can also cause similar symptoms.

Treatment following a tick bite

- In some circumstances, a short (1-day) antibiotic treatment soon after a tick bite might prevent the development of Lyme disease. Several criteria must be met:
 - The tick must be identified as the blacklegged tick (deer tick)
 - The tick must have been attached for at least 36 hours (if it is engorged -- puffed up with blood -- then it was probably on this long).
 - The local infection rate in the blacklegged ticks must be at least 20%. This is likely the case for much of Minnesota, but call MDH (651-201-5414) if you have any questions.
 - The treatment must be started within 72 hours (3 days) of finding the attached tick on yourself.
 - The treatment is only for adults and children 8 years or older.
- Talk to your doctor about the single dose antibiotic treatment if you meet these criteria. You can also take a "wait and see" approach and watch for signs and symptoms of Lyme disease. Prompt treatment of the disease is very effective and will prevent more severe signs and symptoms.

Is there a vaccine for Lyme disease?

- No. There was a vaccine for a while, but the manufacturer pulled it off the market citing poor sales. We do not expect any other Lyme disease vaccines in the near future. A vaccine against Lyme disease would not protect against other tick-borne diseases.

If I've had Lyme disease in the past, am I immune from getting it again?

- No. There is no evidence to suggest that getting Lyme disease once means you are protected from getting it again; there are individuals who have had the disease more than once.

What is the likelihood of having complications after finishing treatment for Lyme disease?

- Most people have a complete resolution of their symptoms after treatment. A small percentage of patients (especially those diagnosed in the later stages of the disease) have persistent complaints after treatment. In that instance, our doctor will help you determine whether further antibiotic treatment is necessary.

What can be done to control tick populations?

- There are measures you can take to reduce the number of ticks around your home. In general, drier conditions mean fewer blacklegged ticks:
- Keep lawns mowed, brush trimmed, and leaf litter moved away from the home.
- Keep trails or paths in wooded areas on your property clear of vegetation.
- Make a landscape barrier (such as a three foot wide border of wood chips) between your lawn and the woods.