



Dear Friend,

Lyme disease was first recognized in the U.S. in 1975, after a mysterious outbreak of arthritis symptoms near Lyme, Connecticut.

Since then, reports of Lyme disease have increased dramatically, and the disease has become a serious public health problem. Within the U.S., the highest incidence occurs in the Northeast, especially here in New York State.

This brochure provides important information about Lyme disease, as well as preventive steps you can take to reduce your chance of getting it and other tick-borne diseases. Lyme disease is treatable, but the long-term effects can be severe if left untreated.

Please don't hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions or comments about this or any other subject.

Sincerely,

Carl E. Heastie
Speaker of the Assembly

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LYME DISEASE

What you need to know



Courtesy of
Speaker of the Assembly
Carl E. Heastie

The facts about Lyme disease

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that can produce skin, arthritic, neurological and even cardiac symptoms. The bacteria that causes Lyme disease is transmitted by the bite of an infected deer tick (pictured below and on the front). The tick must usually be attached for 36 to 48 hours for the bacteria to spread. Ticks can also transmit other diseases, including tularemia and Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

Once on the skin, the tick generally finds a protected area, including inside and behind the ears, along the hairline, on the back of the neck, in the armpits, on the groin, on the legs, behind the knees or between the toes.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

Symptoms and their severity vary. Early symptoms may be mild and easily overlooked. Symptoms usually appear 3 to 30 days after the bite of an infected tick. The first symptom is usually a slowly expanding red "bull's-eye" rash in excess of 2 inches at the site of the tick bite. Symptoms may be flu-like, including chills, fever, fatigue, headache, neck stiffness, jaw discomfort, pain or stiffness in muscles or joints. If left untreated, Lyme disease can progress to more serious stages, affecting the heart, liver or central nervous system.



Is Lyme disease treatable?

Studies have shown that most cases of Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics. The earlier treatment begins, the easier it is to prevent the long-term effects of the disease. Contact your doctor at the first sign of Lyme disease.

Minimizing your risk:

- When in wooded or grassy areas, wear light-colored long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. This will help you spot ticks. Tuck pants into socks and shirts into pants. Avoid heavy vegetation - stay on well-traveled paths.
- Keep your lawn mowed, and avoid sitting directly on the ground or on stone walls.
- Stack woodpiles away from your house, remove leaf litter and clear brush around your house.
- Once indoors, do a thorough check of your clothes and your entire body, paying particular attention to the backs of knees, behind ears, the scalp and back. Take a bath or shower and put clothes in dryer for 10 minutes.
- Place play equipment in sunny dry areas of the yard, away from woods.
- Check your children and pets for attached or crawling ticks.
- Consider using EPA-registered insect repellents to reduce tick bites. Follow label instructions carefully and use sparingly.
- Ask your veterinarian which pet products reduce tick exposure. Dogs are very susceptible to tick bites.



The actual size of an unengorged adult tick is about the size of a sesame seed. 

Sources: NYS Dept. of Health (www.health.ny.gov), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) and the Mayo Clinic (www.mayoclinic.org)

Separating fact from fiction

Myth: Ticks fly, jump or drop from trees.

Fact: Ticks live in shady, moist areas at ground level. They will cling to tall grass, brush and shrubs, about 18-24 inches off the ground. They also live in lawns and gardens, especially at the edges of woods and around stone walls. They can be active any time the temperature is above freezing. Deer ticks cannot jump or fly and only get on humans and animals by direct contact.

Myth: Burning, twisting or rotating the tick are effective removal techniques.

Fact: Trying to burn or "unscrew" a tick only increases the chance of becoming infected with Lyme disease. The best way to remove a tick is with tweezers or a specialized tick-removal tool. Disinfect the bite site and wash your hands. If a tick has already embedded itself in the skin, it needs to be taken care of immediately.

Myth: A past Lyme disease infection makes a person immune.

Fact: Lyme disease is a bacterial infection. Even if successfully treated, a person may become re-infected if bitten later by another infected tick.