

What is Lyme Disease?

Lyme Disease is a bacterial infection most commonly contracted from the bite of a tick. It is caused by a bacterial spirochete, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, and is the fastest growing tick-borne illness in the U.S. Untreated or inadequately treated, it may cause long-term persistent illness that can infect any organ of the body, including the brain, heart, joints, and nervous system. Other tick-borne diseases (called co-infections) such as Babesiosis, Bartonella, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and Ehrlichiosis are often contracted at the same times.

How is it transmitted?

Ticks are considered vectors, or reservoirs, of disease. They feed on hosts such as deer, mice, squirrels, birds, and other animals. Some researchers believe vectors such as mosquitos, fleas, and biting flies may also transmit Lyme Disease. Ticks can be found wherever there is grass or vegetation. Tick bites can happen anytime of the year and can often go undetected as they can vary in size from a poppy-seed size nymphal to a sesame-seed size adult tick.



Research indicates that a woman with Lyme or other tick-borne infections can transmit the infection to her baby during pregnancy. The question has also been posed recently in a new study suggesting that Lyme Disease may be sexually transmitted, but the evidence is still being debated.

Children and Lyme Disease

Approximately 25 % of all reported cases are children. It is often more difficult to recognize and communicate their symptoms, so they are often overlooked. Failure of parents, teachers, and doctors to recognize Lyme Disease early in its course can result in a child developing a chronic, difficult to treat infection. Lyme Disease has a profound negative impact on a child's life, cognitive function, and ability to perform maximally in school.

Symptoms

Lyme Disease is often called the "Great Imitator" because it can mimic many other diseases. Many Lyme patients have been misdiagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis, Multiple Scleroses, fibromyalgia, ALS, parkinson's, chronic fatigue, ADHD, dementia, or even mental illness. With the bacteria being able to penetrate most parts of the body it can result in a multi-systemic infection. The symptoms of Lyme Disease can be varied, intermittent, and numerous. Symptoms include:

- Flu-like Illness
- Rash
- Bell's Palsy (Facial Paralysis)
- Unexplained Fevers
- Swollen Glands
- Extreme Fatigue
- Headaches
- Joint Pain or Stiffness
- Twitching of the Face of other muscles
- Dizziness, Poor Balance, Vertigo
- Tremors
- Disturbed Sleep
- Shortness of Breath, Coughing
- Heart Palpitations, heart block
- Tingling, Numbness, Pain, Burning, or Stabbing sensations
- Muscle Pain or Cramps
- Depression, Irritability, Mood Swings
- Irritability or Mood Swings
- Decreased short term memory
- Difficulty with speech (word finding, stammering, slurring)
- Unexplained sweats or night sweats
- Abdominal pain (especially in children)
- Sore Throat
- Unexplained menstrual irregularity
- Bladder Infection
- Dementia (Alzheimer's diagnosis)

See website for a comprehensive list.

Diagnosis

Physicians who are experienced and educated in the treatment of Lyme Disease recommend a clinical diagnosis based on an evaluation of your symptoms and your risks. Blood tests are relied upon to support a Lyme Disease diagnosis but because current testing is not accurate, results are unable to be used to conclude a positive or negative diagnosis of Lyme Disease.

What about the rash?

Sometimes a rash called Erythema Migrans (EM) develops at the bite site. A bulls eye rash is diagnostic of Lyme Disease but there are many other types of rashes associated with the Disease and can be mistaken for spider bites or skin infections. It is important to remember that even if your blood tests are negative or you don't remember a rash, you should still ask your doctor to carefully evaluate you for Lyme Disease, taking your symptoms and health history into full account. Show your doctor every rash and take photos before it fades.

Treatment

Experts agree that the earlier you are treated, the better. Currently, the only effective treatment for Lyme Disease is antibiotics and should be repeated or extended if clinical symptoms persist. Opinions on how to diagnose and treat Lyme Disease vary widely among physicians. It is worth getting a second opinion, especially if you are symptomatic and your doctor advises not to treat, or symptoms recur or persist after treatment.

Preventing Chronic Lyme

Failure to recognize and treat Lyme Disease early in its course can result in a chronic, difficult to treat infection. Avoiding a tick bite remains the first step in preventing chronic Lyme Disease. There can be ticks wherever there is grass or vegetation and tick bites can happen any time of the year. Show your doctor every rash.

Know the Facts

- Lyme Disease is a nationwide problem and is seriously underreported, especially for the Southern U.S.
- Scientists have identified more strains and species of *Borrelia Burgdorferi* in the South, including Alabama, than in the Northeast.
- Not all medical professionals are trained to diagnose and treat Lyme Disease.
- Understand that blood tests are not reliable in the diagnosis of Lyme Disease. False negatives are common. Some states have legislated guidelines requiring physicians to inform patients that Lyme Disease is still a possibility even if a blood test is negative.
- Not everyone who contracts Lyme Disease will get a rash.
- CDC criteria are for surveillance purposes, not diagnosis.
- Lyme is a clinical diagnosis based on symptoms, history, labs, and examination.
- Lyme symptoms can develop days or months after a tick bite.
- Know your treatment options.
- Don't be afraid to get a second opinion.
- Expect to get better.

Tick Removal

- Do not burn or use any substance on tick.
- Do not grasp, squeeze, or twist body of tick.
- Grab tick close to skin with tweezers.
- Pull tick straight out.
- Use antiseptic on skin.
- Disinfect hands thoroughly.

Always use a physician for possible diagnosis, testing, and treatment, especially if tick parts remain after removal.

There are many good sources of accurate information about proper diagnosis and treatment of tick-borne disease.

Please visit:

- www.LymeDiseaseAssociation.org
- International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society: www.ILADS.org
- www.LymeDisease.org
- www.igenex.com



We are a 501(c)(3) all volunteer patient advocacy group dedicated to Lyme and tick-borne disease prevention, education, and patient support.

For more information and to contact us,

Please visit:

AlabamaLymeDisease.org

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