Babesiosis

Babesiosis is an infectious disease which is carried by Ixodid ticks (i.e. wood ticks, deer ticks). It most commonly occurs in the summer when Ixodid ticks are out. It affects adults and children the same. Most cases of this illness have occurred in the northeastern and northern Midwestern states. There are no vaccines for humans. This is an uncommon illness that shows itself in many different forms, suggesting anything from the flu to being more seriously ill. Because of this, it is hard to diagnose this infection.

Wood Ticks
(Larger Than Actual Size)

CAUSES

The babesia (a small protozoan, like a germ) is a parasite that can live in your red blood cells. The babesia is spread to people from the bite of a tick. An infected person cannot pass this infection directly to other people. Many different ticks can carry babesia. These ticks, in turn, live on deer, rodents and elsewhere. People get bitten when walking through areas where these animals live, especially if there are areas of tall grass. You may not know that you were bitten by a tick.

SYMPTOMS

Babesiosis can cause several different forms of illness:

- A moderately severe form of illness which presents the same as malaria: high fever, headache, chills, anemia.
- As a mild flu like illness: fevers, chills, sweats, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, aches, pains.
- A sudden severe illness resulting in death or a long, drawn out recovery.
- As a *subclinical* (cannot tell you have it) infection with almost no symptoms.

People with certain risks factors are more likely to have more severe illness. These risk factors are:

- Age over 50.
- Presence of cancer or HIV disease.
- A weakened immune system.

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver may suspect babesiosis based on your symptoms, your travel history and/or where you live. The diagnosis of babesiosis can be made by examining your blood under a microscope or by a specialized blood test.

TREATMENT

Medications are used to treat infections (*antibiotics*), taken as a combination, are usually effective in treating this illness. Antibiotics are not necessary if you have few or no symptoms, unless your infection has been present for more than three months.

PREVENTION

- Search body for ticks after possible exposure such as being in a tick ridden area. Ticks often have to be on the body at least a day to transfer the illness to the person carrying them.
- Try to avoid areas with high tick populations or areas with deer or mice that carry the ticks.
- Wear clothes covering the lower half of the body. These should be sprayed with an insecticide (*permethrin*).

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take any medications or treatments as told. It may take days or weeks to improve.
- Be sure you understand any restrictions on activity and any diet instructions from your caregiver.
- Report any new symptoms to your caregiver (especially if you have a rash). People who have babesiosis could also have other infections passed to them from the tick bite.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You are not improving in the time expected.
- You develop a rash.
- You become ill again after initial improvement.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop sudden, severe weakness.
- You develop severe abdominal pain.
- You develop breathing difficulty.

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