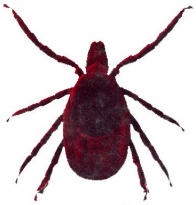
Deer Tick Bites



Deer Tick
(not actual size)

Deer ticks are brown arachnids (*spider family*) that vary in size from as small as the head of a pin to 1/4 inch (1/2 cm) diameter. They thrive in wooded areas. Deer are the preferred host of adult deer ticks. Small rodents are the host of young ticks (*nymphs*). When a person walks in a field or wooded area, young and adult ticks in the surrounding grass and vegetation can attach themselves to the skin. They can suck blood for hours to days if unnoticed. Ticks are found all over the U.S.

Some ticks carry a specific bacteria (*Borrelia burgdorferi*) that causes an infection called Lyme disease. The bacteria is typically passed into a person during the blood sucking process. This happens after the tick has been attached for at least a number of hours. While ticks can be found all over the U.S., those carrying the bacteria that causes Lyme disease are most common in New England and the Midwest. Only a small proportion of ticks in these areas carry the Lyme disease bacteria and cause human infections.

Ticks usually attach to warm spots on the body, such as the:

- Head.
- Back.
- Neck.
- Armpits.
- Groin.

SYMPTOMS

Most of the time, a deer tick bite will not be felt. You may or may not see the attached tick. You may notice mild irritation or redness around the bite site. If the deer tick passes the Lyme disease bacteria to a person, a round, red rash may be noticed 2 to 3 days after the bite. The rash may be clear in the middle, like a bull's-eye or target.

If not treated, other symptoms may develop several days to weeks after the onset of the rash. These symptoms may include:

- New rash lesions.
- Fatigue and weakness.
- General ill feeling and achiness.
- Chills.
- Headache and neck pain.
- Swollen lymph glands.
- Sore muscles and joints.

5 to 15% of untreated people with Lyme disease may develop more severe illnesses after several weeks to months. This may include inflammation of the brain lining (*meningitis*), nerve palsies, an abnormal heartbeat, or severe muscle and joint pain and inflammation (*myositis or arthritis*).

DIAGNOSIS

- Physical exam and medical history.
- Viewing the tick if it was saved for confirmation.
- Blood tests (to check or confirm the presence of Lyme disease).

TREATMENT

Most ticks do not carry disease. If found, an attached tick should be removed using tweezers. Tweezers should be placed under the body of the tick so it is removed by its attachment parts (*pincers*).

If there are signs or symptoms of being sick, or Lyme disease is confirmed, medicines (*antibiotics*) that kill germs are usually prescribed. In more severe cases, antibiotics may be given through an intravenous (IV) access.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Always remove ticks with tweezers. Do not use petroleum jelly or other methods to kill or remove the tick. Slide the tweezers under the body and pull out as much as you can. If you are not sure what it is, save it in a jar and show your caregiver.
- Once you remove the tick, the skin will heal on its own. Wash your hands and the affected area with water and soap. You may place a bandage on the affected area.
- Take medicine as directed. You may be advised to take a full course of antibiotics.
- Follow up with your caregiver as recommended.

FINDING OUT THE RESULTS OF YOUR TEST

Not all test results are available during your visit. If your test results are not back during the visit, make an appointment with your caregiver to find out the results. Do not assume everything is normal if you have not heard from your caregiver or the medical facility. It is important for you to follow up on all of your test results.

PROGNOSIS

If Lyme disease is confirmed, early treatment with antibiotics is very effective. Following preventive guidelines is important since it is possible to get the disease more than once.

PREVENTION

- Wear long sleeves and long pants in wooded or grassy areas. Tuck your pants into your socks.
- Use an insect repellent while hiking.
- Check yourself, your children, and your pets regularly for ticks after playing outside.
- Clear piles of leaves or brush from your yard. Ticks might live there.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You or your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C).
- You develop a severe headache following the bite.
- You feel generally ill.
- You notice a rash.
- You are having trouble removing the tick.
- The bite area has red skin or yellow drainage.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your face is weak and droopy or you have other neurological symptoms.
- You have severe joint pain or weakness.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
American Academy of Family Physicians: www.aafp.org

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