

Lyme Disease



Lyme disease is a bacterial disease spread by ticks. While it is most prevalent in the Northeastern U.S., it has been found in all but a few states as well as other parts of the world. The name has nothing to do with fruit, but comes from the place where the disease was first reported, Lyme, Connecticut. Lyme Disease affects people and dogs. It is rare in other domestic animals.

How Lyme Disease is Spread Lyme disease is caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is transmitted to people and dogs by the bite of ticks, most commonly the black-legged deer tick. Wooded, brushy areas outdoors are likely locations for these ticks. The tick lives by attaching to a host and feeding on blood. While attached, it can spread Lyme disease through its saliva. Research has shown that in most cases, the disease is not transmitted until the tick has been attached for 48 to 72 hours. Lyme disease is not spread directly from one person to another or from a dog to a person.

Symptoms in People The first symptom in people is usually a red, bulls-eye shaped rash, which appears a few days to a week after exposure. The rash may be accompanied or followed by fever, headache, fatigue, and muscle aches. Without treatment, the disease can progress and cause swollen and painful joints, meningitis, and heart problems. Doctors can often diagnose Lyme disease based on a physical examination, but laboratory tests can be helpful.

Symptoms in Dogs As in humans, a rash may appear around the tick bite soon after infection. Unfortunately, this is much less noticeable since it may be hidden by fur. Other symptoms are fever, lethargy, swollen lymph nodes, loss of appetite, and limping. Some infected dogs do not show any symptoms. The disease can cause inflammation of the kidneys, especially in Labrador Retrievers, and can damage the heart and nervous system in later stages. Some cases of Lyme disease in dogs can be detected on a physical exam, but tests of blood or joint fluid are often needed.

Treatment Both people and dogs are treated for Lyme disease with antibiotics like Doxycycline. Additional medications may be prescribed to help with pain and inflammation. Treatment may take a month or longer, and is most successful when started within a few weeks of infection. It is possible for the organism to remain in the body long-term, leading to periodic flare-ups.

Preventing Lyme Disease Whenever possible, avoid areas likely to be infested with ticks. If you do enter tick-infested areas, wear a long-sleeved shirt and tuck your pant legs into your boots or socks. Light colored clothing can make it easier to spot ticks. Tick repellents are beneficial to protect people and pets just be sure to read the label carefully and follow all safety precautions. Your veterinarian can recommend some excellent tick control products that are safe for dogs. After leaving a tick-infested area, check yourself and your dog carefully for ticks.

Attached ticks can be removed using tweezers or inexpensive tick removal tools. To remove a tick, it should be grasped as close to the skin as possible and pulled straight out. Applying insecticide or a hot match to the tick is not a good practice because it may actually increase the amount of disease-carrying saliva released by the tick. After the tick has been removed, cleanse the area with antiseptic soap and wash your hands thoroughly. Let your doctor know if you have been bitten by a tick. Some physicians recommend antibiotic treatment of tick-exposed people even before any symptoms occur.

A vaccination against Lyme disease is available for dogs. It is recommended for dogs living in areas where the disease is prevalent. Check with your veterinarian to see if your dog should be vaccinated. Unfortunately, there is no vaccine currently available for people.