

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

## Lyme Disease



### Burlington County Health Department

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**Public Health**  
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Burlington County Health Department  
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### What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection caused by the bite of an infected tick.

### What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

Lyme disease can have a wide range of symptoms, depending on the stage of infection. Early signs start anywhere from 3 to 30 days after the tick bite and include: fever, chills, fatigue, muscle and joint aches, and swollen lymph nodes. "Bulls-eye" rashes (officially named erythema migrans rash) are the most notable symptom. They occur in 70% to 80% of infected people. It expands over a few days and can be up to 12 inches or more. It is warm to the touch, but rarely itchy or painful.



"Classic" erythema migrans rash

Later symptoms (days to months after tick bite) include: severe headache and stiff neck, additional rashes on other areas of the body, arthritis with severe joint pain and swelling (particularly the knee), facial palsy (loss of muscle tone or droop on one or both sides of the face), intermittent pain in muscles, tendons, joints, and bones, heart palpitations or irregular heartbeat, dizziness or shortness of breath, swelling of the brain or spinal cord, nerve pain, shooting pain, numbness, or tingling in the hands and feet, and problems with short-term memory.

### How is Lyme disease spread?

Lyme disease is spread by the bite of an infected deer tick (or blacklegged tick). Ticks can attach to any part of the body by biting down with their strong jaw. Usually a person will not feel when they get bitten by a tick. Most of the time, ticks are in hard-to-see areas such as the groin, armpits, scalp/along the hairline, behind the knees, and around the ears. In order for the tick to infect a person with Lyme disease, it usually needs to be attached for 36-48 hours. Ticks are very small and hard to see. They are usually about the size of a poppy seed. It is important to carefully check for ticks when in areas with them. A blood test is sometimes used to confirm a diagnosis of Lyme disease, though it is not always necessary.

### Where are ticks found?

Ticks are most common between the months of April to October. They usually live on wooded areas with dense shrubs, brush, and leaf litter. Tall grass is another place they may be. However, ticks are not only found in wooded areas. About 70% of Lyme disease cases were acquired in the person's own backyard.

### Is there a treatment for Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics. If found early, it is usually easy to quickly and completely treat the infection. In a small number of cases, symptoms can last for more than 6 months, called post-treatment Lyme disease (PTLD). The exact cause for PTLD is not known; but even when it does happen, people almost always get better with time.

## What is the best way to prevent Lyme disease?

Reducing exposure to ticks is the best defense against Lyme disease. If that is not possible, avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter, walk in the center of hiking or walking trails, use tick repellent with DEET, wear light-colored long sleeve shirts and pants, check your body periodically while outside and when you come in, properly remove ticks from your body if any are found.

Remember to check dog and cats that spend any time outside. Dogs are very susceptible and are a meal choice for ticks. Check for ticks daily and remove it right away if any are found. Dogs have much more hair than people, making it more difficult to find ticks.

Make your yard less attractive to ticks. Clear tall grass and brush around homes and edges of lawns. Place a 3-foot wide barrier of wood chips or gravel between lawns and wooded areas around patios and play equipment. Stack wood neatly and in a dry area (this discourages rodents that tick feed on). Remove any old furniture or trash from the yard that may give ticks a place to hide.

## Where can you get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The Burlington County Department of Health at (609)-265-5533.
- The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) at (609) 292-9560 or on the NJDOH Website at <http://www.nj.gov/health/>