



Lyme Disease - the Basics

What Is Lyme Disease?

First identified in a group of children in Lyme, Connecticut, Lyme disease has now been found in nearly all states and 18 other countries. More than 90% of all reported cases are in three regions of the United States:

- Northeast, from Massachusetts to Maryland.
- North Central States, mostly in Minnesota and Wisconsin.
- West Coast, particularly Northern California.

Aside from a bull's-eye rash, the symptoms are random so Lyme disease can be hard to diagnose. Unfortunately, unless Lyme disease is treated promptly, it can also be difficult to cure. For these reasons, people living in high-risk areas can have considerable anxiety about Lyme disease, and doctors tend to over-diagnose and over-treat it.

What Causes Lyme Disease?

Lyme disease is caused by bacteria transmitted through the bite of the tiny black-legged (or deer) ticks found in the Eastern and Central United States and the western black-legged tick in the Pacific West. The riskiest months for Lyme disease are from May through September, since that's when the young ticks are likely to be biting.

In humans, the bacteria may cause flu-like symptoms. It invades many tissues -- including the heart and nervous system -- and triggers an immune response that leads to Lyme arthritis.

Personal Protection

There are many different products on the market, with different ingredients, concentrations and effectiveness. The most effective contain DEET, permethrin (only to be applied on clothing), picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus. If you decide to use one, be sure to follow label directions and apply repellent carefully.

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