

Lyme Disease: Frequently Asked Questions

Lyme disease occurs from the bite of a blacklegged tick that was infected by harmful bacteria. It is possible to treat Lyme disease. When Lyme disease is not treated, it can cause health issues that may harm your joints, brain, and heart. It is important to know the signs of a bite and how to protect yourself.

What are the early signs of Lyme disease?

At first, you may overlook a bite because the tick can be as small as a poppy seed. Early signs of Lyme disease will happen within three to 30 days of a bite, and may include fever, joint pain, body aches, and headaches. You might notice a mark (rash) on your skin that looks like a bug bite, but does not hurt or itch. The rash is usually greater than 5 cm across and slowly spreads outwards.

Early signs that the disease is spreading will happen within three months of a bite. You may feel tired and weak. There may be more marks (or rashes) on your skin. You may also notice a difference in the way your heart beats, going suddenly too fast or slow, or changing between the two. Also, you may find it hard to do things that are complicated or require attention. Doctors can check for other, more serious issues that may affect your heart or brain.

How do I know if I have Lyme disease?

If you notice any of the signs previously mentioned, or are worried about a tick bite, your doctor can find out if you have Lyme disease. Doctors can do this early if you have a rash that seems to be getting bigger. It is possible that you will not have a rash or any of the early signs. In this case, your doctor will need to do blood samples to see if there is an infection. Your doctor will ask about where you have been outdoors to find out if you were in an area that may have had infected blacklegged ticks.

What does a rash look like from a tick bite that may have caused Lyme disease?

The rash is sometimes described as a bull's-eye. It is usually round and slowly gets bigger in size. In most cases, you will notice this rash within seven days of a bite. Sometimes rashes can be confused with other types of insect or spider bites, or eczema. It is also possible that you may be sensitive to insect bites in general, so any kind of bite can cause a rash-like mark on your skin.



It is important to visit your doctor so they can correctly tell you whether the rash is related to Lyme disease.

What should I do if I am pregnant and find a tick on my skin?

The first thing to do is to remove the tick as quickly as possible. If the tick is attached to your skin, use tweezers (or a tick remover) and pull it straight out. Do not twist the tick. It can take a few minutes to remove a tick. It is normal if you notice some swelling after removing the tick. The swelling may appear within 24 hours but should not spread. Even if you are able to remove the tick, you should still watch for early signs of Lyme disease over the next 30 days. You can also let your doctor know if you have any questions or concerns.

Is there any medicine (antibiotics) I can take if I am pregnant and have been bitten by a tick?

The only medicine (antibiotic) with strong research to support it is called doxycycline, and it is usually only prescribed after a bite from a high-risk area and within 72 hours after removing the tick. This reduces the risk of Lyme disease. A tick bite is considered high-risk if it happens in an area that is known to have infected blacklegged ticks (more than 20% of the ticks in the area are infected) and if the tick was attached for 36 hours or longer.

What other treatment options do I have if I am pregnant and have early Lyme disease?

Right now there is no research about other treatment options during pregnancy. If you are worried about using antibiotics, then there are pills that have been tested with non-pregnant women and may be prescribed. You should consult with your doctor to decide the best option and consider talking to an allergist to make sure the treatment option will suit you.

If I have a tick bite, can I infect someone with Lyme disease?

At this time, we do not have evidence to say that Lyme disease can be passed from one person to another through sexual contact or blood.

If I have Lyme disease during pregnancy or while breastfeeding, can I pass the disease to my baby?

The research we have right now does not suggest that Lyme disease can be passed from mom to baby during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. The risk of passing Lyme disease to a baby during pregnancy is considered very low. If you are pregnant, you should receive the same care as non-pregnant women who may be at risk for Lyme disease or who have had a tick bite. As well, you can continue to breastfeed if you want. If you have concerns after delivery, your baby can be seen by a paediatrician who specializes in infectious disease.

What can I do to prevent tick bites?

Wear light-coloured clothing to easily spot ticks. Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants, tucking your shirt into your pants and socks over your pant legs. You can also kill any ticks on your clothes by putting your garments in the dryer at a high heat setting or first washing them in hot water and then tumble drying at a high heat. Always check your outdoor gear, spouse, children, and pets before coming into your house. Also, check your skin and then shower within two hours of coming home to remove ticks that have not attached. Do a full body check, including checking in and behind your ears, as well as in your hair and armpits, behind your knees, between your legs, around your waist and groin area and in your belly button. Finally, try to choose clear paths and walkways when you are outside, and always apply bug spray.

For more information visit
pregnancyinfo.ca/lymedisease

