

Lyme Disease & Tick Bites

Self-Care Tips



For more information, look up the = **topics in bold** in the index of your *Healthwise Handbook*.

What is Lyme Disease and where does it occur?



Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that can be spread from infected ticks to people. The infected ticks penetrate the skin and ingest blood. On the Pacific Coast, the western black-legged tick can carry the disease, but only about 1% are infected. The percent of infected ticks is slightly higher (3-6%) in California's northern coastal counties of Sonoma, Humboldt, Lake, and Mendocino. In fact, the risk of getting Lyme disease is very low in California. Most cases of Lyme disease occur in the Midwestern and Northeastern parts of the United States, where 15-30% of ticks are infected.

What are the signs of Lyme Disease?

The first sign of Lyme disease is usually a spreading red rash around the **tick bite** (📖) that looks similar to a "bull's-eye" and begins four days to three weeks after the bite. The **rash** (📖) appears as a red area that is clear in the center and is at least a few inches in diameter. The next most common sign of Lyme disease is joint swelling and pain, or loss of movement on one side of the face. This usually occurs a few weeks or months after the bite.

Prevention

Lyme disease can be prevented by avoiding tick bites. The most common places that ticks can be found are on brush and grass in rural areas that receive afternoon shade. Ticks do not fly, jump, or drop from trees. They climb to the tips of vegetation and wait for animals or people to brush against them. To protect yourself against tick bites:

- Wear long pants and tuck pant legs into socks.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin.
- Apply insect repellent containing Permethrin to clothing, especially to socks, pant legs, and sleeves. (Permethrin can also be found in spray products for killing lice on furniture.) Do NOT apply Permethrin to skin.
- After exposure to tick areas, search clothing for ticks, then wash your clothes.
- Perform a careful, thorough body check for ticks after exposure and on the following day.



What do I do If I find a tick on me?

- Remove attached ticks with forceps or tweezers. Grasp the tick as close to the surface of the skin as possible and then pull the tick out with a gentle steady motion. Do NOT twist!
- If any parts remain in the skin, remove them as you would a splinter.
- Do NOT apply heat, vaseline or nail polish remover to the tick. If the tick is infected this may increase your risk of getting Lyme disease.
- Throw away the tick. It is not necessary to bring it into the doctor's office or the emergency room.

Do I need a blood test?

Blood tests should not be done after a tick bite, because infection is rare and cannot be detected in your blood for several weeks. Blood tests are helpful in diagnosing Lyme Disease when signs of the disease are found by a physical exam.

Do I need to be immunized against Lyme disease?

There is a new vaccine against Lyme disease. It is NOT recommended for all Californians. The vaccine is recommended only for people who live or work outdoors in areas with dense vegetation (especially in northern coastal counties) and regularly remove ticks from themselves. Vaccination is not recommended for persons who hike, camp or vacation in areas with ticks. These recommendations are consistent with state and national guidelines.



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Treatment

Lyme disease can be cured if diagnosed early and treated with the correct antibiotic. However, antibiotics should not be given just for tick bites, unless there is proof of infection.

Where can I get additional information about Lyme disease?



- The County Health Department or Local Mosquito and Vector Control District— check your telephone directory.
- The California Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Communicable Disease Control
Website: <http://www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/ps/dcdc/cm-frame.htm>.
(510) 540-2566
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases
Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/lymeinfo.htm>.
(970) 221-6400

When to Call Kaiser Permanente

- If part of the tick remains in your skin and you can't remove it.
- If you develop a spreading red **rash** (📖) around the tick bite that looks similar to a "bull's-eye."
- If you are experiencing **joint swelling with pain** (📖), or loss of movement on one side of the face a few weeks or months after the tick bite.