

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Information for the Public – Lyme Disease

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi*. These bacteria are transmitted to humans by the bite of infected deer ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*, *I. pacificus*) and cause more than 16,000 infections in the United States each year. Most infections occur primarily during the spring and summer when tick populations are at their peak, but infection can occur at any time of the year.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

The first symptom of Lyme disease is usually a characteristic “bull’s-eye” rash (Erythema migrans or EM rash) at the site of the tick bite. This rash starts out small then slowly expands. Other symptoms include general tiredness, headache, fever, stiff neck, muscle aches, joint aches, and swollen lymph nodes. In late disease, chronic arthritis, and heart and nervous complications may occur.

How is Lyme disease spread?

People get infected through the bite of an infected tick. Lyme disease is not spread from person to person.

Who is most at risk for Lyme disease?

People are at the most risk for Lyme disease if they visit, work in, or live near wooded, brushy, or grassy areas where infected ticks are common.

How can I protect myself?

- Whenever possible, avoid areas that are likely to be infested with ticks, particularly in the spring and summer.
- If you go into tick-infested areas, wear light colored clothing so that ticks can be spotted on your clothes more easily.
- Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants and tuck your pants into your socks.
- Ticks are usually located close to the ground, so wearing high rubber boots may provide additional protection.
- Apply insect repellents containing DEET to skin. Apply permethrin to clothing. Follow label instructions carefully, especially when applying repellents onto children.
- Perform a tick check all over your body. Remove attached ticks with a pair of fine tipped tweezers. DO NOT use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish or other products. DO NOT squeeze the tick. With fine tipped tweezers, grasp the tick firmly and as closely to the skin as possible. With a steady motion, pull the tick's body away from the skin. Cleanse the area with soap and water.
- Remove leaf litter, brush, and woodpiles around houses and the edges of yards.