

What Is Lyme Disease Anyway???



Lyme disease is an infection caused by a type of bacteria called a spirochete. Although originally discovered in Lyme, Connecticut, Lyme disease has now been reported in most states. The disease is more properly called Borreliosis, after the bacterial species that causes it - *Borrelia burgdorferi*.

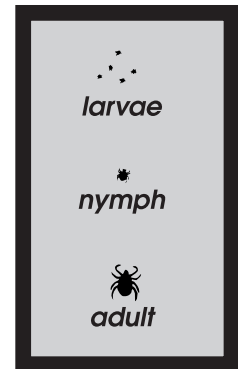
Lyme Disease is a serious and life threatening infection. It can cause an array of symptoms, including kidney, heart, skin and neurological disease, abortion, and infertility. The most common signs in dogs are low grade fever (103-104° F), weight loss, and lameness or joint pain, which may shift from leg to leg. Symptoms in cats are similar, although cats are less susceptible than dogs. Symptoms may occur as soon as 4 days after exposure to an infected tick, or as long as 1 year later. The average incubation period is 1 month.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

The deer tick is the most common carrier of Lyme disease in Wisconsin, Minnesota and the eastern coastal states. Recently, other species of ticks such as the lone star tick, the wood tick and insects such as deer flies, horseflies and mosquitoes have been found to carry the disease. Currently these insects are not felt to be important carriers of the disease.

Deer are not the only animals that harbor deer ticks, so pets can pick up Lyme disease whether or not they are in deer-populated areas. The larval deer ticks prefer to feed on small rodents that live in grassy or brushy areas, often around the fringes of woods or fields.

The deer tick lives a rather complex life cycle. It develops from an egg to a larvae, larva to a nymph, and finally from nymph to an adult. The deer ticks are among the first ticks to become active in the spring, and they remain active in various stages until the first snows in the fall. All three life cycle stages of ticks can transmit Lyme disease, and all three are very small and difficult to find. They are active almost all year 'round.



**DEER TICK
(actual size)**

CAN LYME DISEASE BE TREATED?

Yes. The bacterium that causes the disease is sensitive to several antibiotics. Tetracycline is the one most commonly used to treat the disease in animals. The length of time needed to treat the disease varies, but two weeks is usually the minimum amount. Prolonged treatment may be necessary, and relapses and reinfection are common. The earlier the diagnosis of the disease is made, the more successful treatment is likely to be. Even with prompt treatment, however, there can be permanent damage, especially if the infection involved the brain, kidneys or heart. Preventing the disease altogether is a much better alternative than waiting for your pet to pick up the disease.



SHOULD I VACCINATE?

We recommend vaccination for Lyme disease if you take your dog hunting, hiking, camping or running in fields or woods. We also recommend it if you can see deer from your house or yard. If you live in a town, city or suburb with no woods or fields nearby, and you don't travel with your dog, vaccination is probably not necessary.

We also advise the use of tick control products on your pet if he or she has tick exposure. Even if you vaccinate your dog, ticks carry other diseases

besides Lyme disease, and their bites can become irritated or infected as well. Prompt removal of any ticks you do find on your dog is also recommended to help prevent exposure to disease.



LYME DISEASE AFFECTS PEOPLE TOO!

Conduct thorough tick checks on yourself, your children and your pets after spending time outdoors. This includes time in your own backyard or garden, as well as when camping or hiking in wooded areas. Avoid grassy and marshy woodland areas, and don't walk barefoot in grassy areas. Wear light colored clothing. This makes ticks easier to find. Tuck pants into boots or socks and wear long sleeved shirts, buttoned at the cuffs.

Ticks do not fly or jump onto their hosts. They wait atop grasses and other vegetation until an animal brushes against them. Then they cling to skin, fur or clothing and will crawl for a time on their host before they embed and feed.

Ticks must be embedded and engorged (not flat) before they transmit the lyme disease bacteria. Therefore it is important to look for and remove any ticks as soon as possible in order to prevent infection.

Protect yourself and your pets with insect/tick repellents. Products containing 30% or more DEET are almost 100% effective in repelling deer ticks on people. We have several good, long lasting products available to help you to safely protect your dog or cat from Lyme disease. Newer veterinary products have much higher margins of safety and efficacy than older pyrethrin and permethrin products. Products you can buy in stores are not the same!

CAN I GET LYME DISEASE FROM MY PET?

It is not known at this time whether Lyme disease can be spread directly from animals to humans. *Borrelia burgdorferi* organisms have been found in the urine of infected animals, however, and it is speculated that urine and feces from birds and rodents may be contributing to the spread of the disease. Certainly infected ticks can carry the disease from animals to people in close proximity. At this time we don't believe that animal-human transmission is a significant factor in the disease, but caution is advised if you are exposed to an animal which has the disease. Use insect repellents conscientiously, and wash your hands or wear gloves when handling animal wastes or deer carcasses.



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