

# Lyme disease

## FACT SHEET



Washtenaw County  
Health Department

### What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is spread by the bite of an infected blacklegged tick. In the United States, most cases of Lyme disease occur in northeastern states and the upper Midwest, including Michigan.

### What are the symptoms?

#### Early Symptoms (3-30 days post-tick bite):

- Skin rash or redness at the site of the tick bite, which may enlarge and look like a bull's-eye (occurs in 70-80% of infected persons.)
- Fever and chills
- Headache and neck stiffness
- Fatigue
- Sore and aching muscles and joints
- Swollen lymph nodes

#### Later stages (days to months post-tick bite):

- Additional skin rashes on other body areas
- Weakness of facial muscles
- Severe headaches and neck stiffness (meningitis)
- Heart palpitations, dizziness, and shortness of breath
- Arthritis of large joints, such as the knees

### How is it spread?

Blacklegged ticks spread Lyme disease to humans. Immature ticks, which are about the size of a sesame seed, cause most human infections. Ticks become infected by biting infected animals. They then bite humans. In most cases, the tick must be attached for at least 36 hours to transfer the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. Tick bites most commonly occur during the spring and summer.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*

### How to manage tick bites

- Using tweezers grip the body firmly and pull straight out of the skin. Do not twist the tick.
- After removing the tick, clean the bite area and your hands.
- Tick identification and testing is available from the State of Michigan.
- See your healthcare provider if you develop a rash or fever within several weeks of tick removal.
- If you choose to dispose of a live tick, submerge it in alcohol in a sealed bag or container, wrap tightly in tape or flush it down the toilet. Never crush a tick with your fingers.

### How is it treated?

After symptoms develop, early treatment with appropriate antibiotics usually results in rapid and complete recovery from Lyme disease.

### How is it prevented?

Avoid areas with ticks, such as wooded areas, brushy areas, and places with high deer traffic. If you cannot avoid these areas:

- Wear long sleeves, long pants, high socks and shoes.
- Wear light colored clothing to make spotting ticks easier.
- Apply tick repellent.
- Check your skin for ticks at least once a day.
- Examine gear and pets. Ticks can ride into homes on clothing and pets, and then attach to a person later.
- **If bitten by a tick, remove the tick promptly.**

Antibiotics are **not routinely recommended** after a tick bite for prevention of Lyme disease, but may be prescribed when certain conditions are met. Discuss this with your healthcare provider.