

Lyme disease is caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium that is transmitted to humans by the black-legged tick or deer-tick. It is the most prevalent tick-borne infectious disease in the United States. In 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 21,273 cases of Lyme disease. Although the disease has been reported in nearly every state, more than 95 percent of all cases are concentrated in just several areas, including New England. This puts New England Laborers at increased risk because so much of our work is performed outdoors. Individuals, including children, who live near wooded areas, play or work in their yard, participate in activities such as hiking, camping, fishing and hunting are also at risk.

Typically, the first symptom of Lyme disease is a red rash that starts as a small red spot at the site of the tick bite and expands over time, forming a circular or oval-shape that resembles a bulls-eye. As infection spreads, rashes can appear at different sites on the body and are often accompanied by symptoms such as fever, headache, stiff neck, body aches, and fatigue.

Treatment

When diagnosed and treated early Most cases of Lyme disease can be [treated](#) successfully with a few weeks of antibiotics. However, after several months of infection, slightly more than half of people not treated with antibiotics develop recurrent attacks of painful and swollen joints, most commonly in the knees. About 10 to 20 percent of untreated people develop chronic arthritis.

Lyme disease can also affect the nervous system, causing such symptoms as stiff neck, Bell's palsy and numbness in the limbs. Less commonly, untreated people can develop heart problems, hepatitis, and severe fatigue.

Prevention

- Avoid tick habitats whenever possible. Deer ticks are found in brush, woods, and tall grass.
- Use caution in warm months, especially May and June.
- Deer ticks are tiny and are easier to spot on light-colored clothing.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts tucked-in.
- Wear long pants with the cuffs tucked in work boots.
- Apply a repellent that has 33% DEET on exposed skin and clothes.
- Additionally, apply permethrin repellent on clothes.

Perform a tick check

The transmission of bacteria from an infected tick is unlikely to occur before 36 hours of attachment so check daily for ticks. Embedded ticks should be removed using fine-tipped tweezers as closely to the skin as possible. Do not be alarmed if the “claws” do not remove from the bite area. The bacteria are contained in the tick's midgut or salivary glands. Cleanse the area with an antiseptic.

