

Lyme Disease in Washington

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is an infection caused by bacteria called *Borrelia burgdorferi*.

How do people get Lyme disease?

People can get Lyme disease after being bitten by a tick that carries the bacteria. The tick must be attached for 36 hours or more to transmit the bacteria to a person.



The blacklegged tick

How common is Lyme disease in Washington State?

In Washington a small black-legged tick carries the bacterium that causes Lyme disease. Very few of the ticks in Washington carry the bacteria, so Lyme disease is very rare here. Fewer than 5 people get Lyme disease in Washington State each year. It is far more common in other areas of the country. More than 90% of cases in the United States occur in the East Coast and upper Midwest.

What are symptoms of Lyme disease?

Symptoms often start 3 days to many weeks after a tick bite. In patients who are not treated, there can be three stages of the disease.

Stage 1

In this stage the first symptom is a red rash that starts at the point of the tick bite and slowly expands over a few days to weeks.

Without treatment, the rash lasts for many weeks. Most of the time, this is the only early symptom. Sometimes people also have fever, headache, tiredness and muscle aches.

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To Learn More

- Infectious Disease
206-987-2073
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



Some people have a local allergic reaction to the tick bite that can look like a Lyme rash but this occurs within hours of the bite and is not Lyme disease.

Stage 2

If the infection is not treated in the early stage, the bacteria can spread to other parts of the body. Symptoms can include:

- Many areas of rash
- Drooping of one or both sides of the face (called facial nerve palsy)
- Severe headache, stiff neck (meningitis)
- Inflammation of the heart (called carditis)
- Some children also have fever, fatigue, headache and joint pain at this stage

Stage 3

If the infection is not treated, it can progress and cause recurrent arthritis (swollen joints which come and go). The knee joints are most often affected. This often resolves even without any treatment.

Sometimes people progress to one of the later stages without having symptoms during the early stage.

How can you tell if a child has Lyme disease?

Children who could have been exposed to Lyme-carrying ticks and have the typical red rash can be diagnosed without any blood tests.

If a child is not diagnosed in the first stage, there are two blood tests used to tell if someone has Lyme disease. One test (called an ELISA) can be positive even if someone isn't infected with the bacteria. If this test is positive, a second test (called a Western Blot) is done to confirm the infection is Lyme disease.

Some of the available tests for Lyme disease are inaccurate, unapproved and misleading. If your child has had a positive test, we would like a copy of these results so we can see if the testing was done by a validated test. Using test results that are not accurate can lead to treatment that isn't needed.

How is Lyme disease treated?

Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics. In early disease, the treatment is amoxicillin or doxycycline taken by mouth. In later stages, oral antibiotics may still be effective, but sometimes an intravenous (IV) antibiotic is needed.

Are there long-term consequences from Lyme disease?

The antibiotics used to treat Lyme disease work well at killing the bacteria. Rarely, some people will keep having symptoms after they are treated. It is unclear why this happens and usually the symptoms go away within six months. Except for the rare case of persistent joint swelling, repeat courses of antibiotics or antibiotics given longer than 4 weeks are not helpful and can be harmful as there can be side-effects of the treatment.

How can you prevent Lyme disease?

Ticks live in wooded, brushy or grassy areas. Avoid hiking through brushy or grassy areas, particularly in the spring and summer.

If you are in an area that might have ticks you should:

- Wear light-colored clothing. This makes it easy to see and remove ticks before they become attached.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and tuck your pants into socks
- Use insect repellents that contains DEET (n,n-diethyl-m-toluamide). Put it on clothes and exposed skin. You can also use permethrin (which kills ticks on contact) on clothes. DEET and permethrin are safe for children, but should be used according to the directions.
- Check for ticks daily and remove them right away.
- Ticks should be removed with tweezers. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible. With a steady motion, pull the tick straight out. Clean the area with an antiseptic.