

# QUICK TIPS

## TASK FORCE ON LYME & TICK-BORNE DISEASES

### FAQS ABOUT LYME DISEASE

#### WHAT IS LYME DISEASE?

Lyme disease is an infection caused by a bacteria (*Borrelia burgdorferi*) that is spread by the bite of an infected tick. Lyme disease can affect the skin, joints, nervous system and/or heart. When detected early, it usually can be treated with oral antibiotics. If left untreated, it often causes serious health problems, like arthritis and heart issues.

#### HOW IS LYME DISEASE SPREAD?

The only way to contract Lyme disease is from the bite of an infected deer tick. Not all deer ticks carry the bacteria that causes Lyme disease; they become infected after feeding on infected animals, such as mice or other small mammals. Transmission of Lyme disease from an infected tick can occur when a tick has been attached and feeding for at least 24-36 hours, which is why it is important to always check for ticks after spending time outdoors.

### WHAT DO I DO IF I AM BITTEN BY A DEER TICK?

As soon as you find a tick attached to your skin, remove it. The risk of Lyme disease is greatly reduced if you remove the tick within the first 36 hours.

- Use pointed tweezers to grasp the tick by the head or mouth parts as close to the skin as possible. DO NOT grasp the body.
- Pull out firmly, making sure that the entire tick is removed. DO NOT jerk or twist the tick.
- Place the tick in a small container of rubbing alcohol to kill it.
- Wash hands and apply antiseptic to the bite immediately to prevent secondary infection.
- Observe the site of the tick bite for the next 30 days for the appearance of a rash. If you develop a rash or have flu-like symptoms, you should contact your doctor and seek medical treatment.

See your doctor immediately and tell him or her of your suspicions, especially if you have found a tick attached to your skin or if you were in an area where ticks were present. Remember, if Lyme disease is discovered early, it can be treated before it becomes a serious problem. Depending on the type of tick-borne infection a person has, a specific antibiotic will be given. All medical personnel agree that early diagnosis and treatment is critical in preventing a serious later-stage disease and potentially chronic illness.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LYME DISEASE

Lyme disease is often hard to diagnose because it has various symptoms that are seen in many other illnesses. Early symptoms can appear anywhere from 3 to 30 days after being bitten by an infected tick.

- In many, but not all cases, a red rash (erythema migrans) develops within a few days to a month later.
- The rash is at least two to six inches in diameter and may have a clearing in the center or look like a bulls-eye. The rash may last for three to five weeks.
- The rash may be accompanied by symptoms including joint pain, chills, fever and fatigue. They may seem too minor to seek medical attention.
- Severe fatigue, stiff neck, tingling or numbness in the arms and legs or facial paralysis can occur with the progression of Lyme disease.

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### HOW CAN I REDUCE THE NUMBER OF TICKS AROUND MY HOME?

While most of us take precautions against deer ticks when we plan to be out in the woods, you can be bitten by a tick in your own back yard as deer ticks are commonly found in lawns, shrubs and gardens. Deer ticks can hitch a ride onto your lawn via small mammals such as mice and chipmunks; therefore, keeping your yard free of clutter and places for these animals to hide can reduce the tick population in your yard.

- Keep your grass mowed and edges trimmed.
- Remove leaf litter, brush and weeds around the house, at edges of the lawn and around stonewalls and woodpiles.
- Keep woodpiles and bird feeders off the ground and away from your home.
- Move children's swing sets and other play equipment in dry, sunny areas of the yard away from the woods. Place them on a mulch or wood chip foundation.
- Clean up and seal stone walls and small openings around the home to discourage rodent activity.
- Keep your pets out of the woods to reduce ticks brought into the home.
- Plan your landscape to restrict the use of groundcover plants in areas where family and pets may walk.
- Incorporate plants into your landscape that do not attract deer and consider installing a fence to keep deer out of your lawn.
- Use gravel pathways and mulch to define your landscape. A 3-foot or wider mulch, gravel or wood chip border between lawn and woods can reduce the tick population.
- Widen and maintain any woodland trails on your property.

**It's Lyme Time!** 

**Protect Yourself Against Lyme Disease**

- 1** Walk in the middle of trails; avoid sitting on logs and leaning on trees.
- 2** Wear a hat, tuck in hair, if possible.
- 3** Wear a long-sleeved shirt fitted at the wrist.
- 4** Wear shoes, no bare feet or sandals.
- 5** Wear long pants tucked into high socks or duct tape around pants.
- 6** Consider Deet for skin and permethrin for clothes.
- 7** Wear white or light-colored clothing to make it easier to see ticks.
- 8** Do tick checks immediately and 3 days after outdoor activity.
- 9** If you find a tick, remove it carefully and save it.
- 10** Ask your veterinarian about protection for your furry friends.

California Lyme Disease Association.