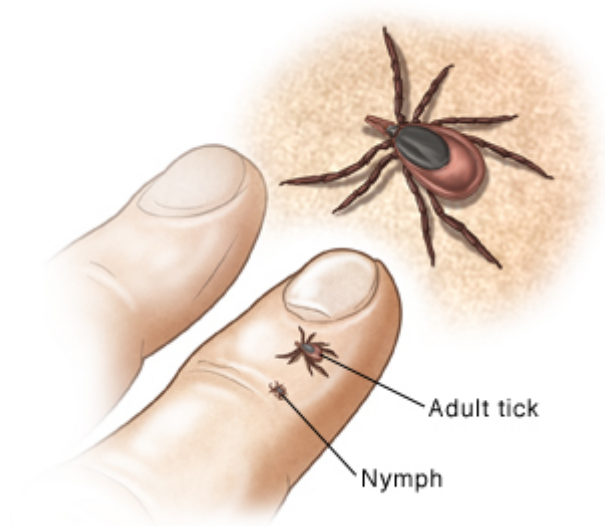


# Preventing Lyme Disease



Ticks are small and spider-like. They feed on the blood of animals and humans. They can carry the germs (bacteria) that cause Lyme disease. The bacteria can pass to a person from a tick bite. It is not passed from person to person. Lyme disease can lead to serious health problems if it is not treated with antibiotics. The best way to prevent Lyme disease is to not be bitten by a tick.



## Preventing tick bites

The disease is carried by the deer tick (blacklegged tick). Young ticks are most likely to carry the bacteria. They are very small, about the size of a poppy seed. They can be found on deer, rodents, and birds. Often the animal brushes the tick onto leaves or other plants as it runs through the woods. Then the tick lives in bushes, grasses, and dead leaves. The most active time of year for infected ticks depends on the part of the country. In the East and Midwest, they are more active from April to September. On the West Coast and in the Southwest, they may be more active from December to February. But you can still be bitten at other times of the year. Below are tips for protecting yourself from tick bites.

## Protect your body

- **Wear clothes that protect you.** Clothing can help protect you from tick bites. Wear long pants and long sleeves in outdoor areas where ticks may live. Tuck your shirt into your pants. Tuck pant legs into your socks. And wear light colors. This helps you to easily see ticks on your clothes.
- **Use insect repellent.** Spray insect repellent that has at least 20% DEET on your exposed skin. You can also use it on clothing, shoes, and camping gear. Don't get DEET on children's hands, mouth, or eyes. You can use products with permethrin on clothing, shoes, and camping gear. But don't spray permethrin on skin. It will cause a rash. Follow the directions on the package of the spray you use. For more information on bug sprays, visit the [National Pesticide Information Center, npic.orst.edu](http://www.npic.orst.edu).
- **Stay away from tick-infested areas.** Don't brush against grasses, bushes, and other plants. Don't walk through dead leaves and other ground plants. Don't sit on fallen logs. And stay away from areas with a lot of deer and rodents.
- **Check yourself for ticks.** After being outdoors, check your clothes and skin for ticks. Keep in mind that the ticks may be as small as a poppy seed. If needed, use a handheld mirror. Or use a full-length mirror. This can help you to see all of your skin. Check carefully around areas with hair. And check these areas well:
  - Scalp

- Behind the ears
- Armpits
- Belly button
- Waist
- Groin
- Backs of the knees
- **Use the clothes dryer.** Put clothes or bedding into a clothes dryer for 1 hour at high heat. This has been shown to kill ticks.
- Bathe as soon as you can after being outdoors in areas with ticks. Doing so may wash the ticks off before they can transmit disease.

## Control ticks around your home

- **Create tick-free safety zones.** Ticks that spread Lyme disease live in ground plants. Ticks crawl onto people from shrubs and grasses in and around wooded areas. Cut bushes and other plants away from the deck or patio and any child play areas. Keep all grasses cut short. Remove dead leaves and other dead plants. Don't put children's play equipment near wooded areas. Put wood chips or gravel on the ground between lawns and wooded areas.
- **Use pesticides.** You can apply them yourself or hire a pest control expert. States have different regulations about pesticides. Ask your local health department for information.
- **Keep deer away.** Deer often carry the ticks that can infect you with Lyme disease. Don't try to pet or feed deer. Ask your local garden center about deer-resistant plants. Ask your local health department about deer control in your area.
- **Prevent ticks on pets.** Pets can bring ticks into your home. Use tick control medicine as advised by your veterinarian. Check your pet for ticks after it comes indoors. Check carefully around the ears.
- **Ask about local tick-control methods.** Some states have tick-control programs. Local health departments may be using methods that can help you control ticks at home.

## If you have a tick

If you find a tick on your skin, don't panic. Most ticks don't carry Lyme disease. And the tick must be attached for 36 to 48 hours before it can infect you. If you find a tick on you, here's what to do:

- If the tick is not yet attached to your skin, remove the tick with tweezers or a tissue. Flush it down the toilet. If you see a tick on your clothes, use a piece of tape to lift it off. Don't touch it with your bare hands.
- If the tick is attached to your skin:
  - Carefully remove the tick with tweezers. If you don't have tweezers, use your fingers protected by a paper towel or a thin cloth. Grasp the tick as close to your skin as possible. Pull slowly and gently to remove the tick. The tick may not let go right away. Don't pull harder. Be patient. Keep trying gently. Don't twist the head or body as you pull. Don't crush or squeeze the body. This can release the bacteria into your body. Never use a hot match, petroleum jelly, or other products to remove a tick. (Call your healthcare provider right away if you can't remove the tick or if part of the tick stays in the skin.)
  - Wash your skin with soap and water after you remove the tick. This will help ensure you remove any bacteria.
  - If you can, save the tick in a tightly sealed glass or plastic container. Take it to your healthcare provider. They may be able to have someone tell for sure if it's the type of tick that spreads

Lyme.

- Call your healthcare provider and describe the bite and the tick. You may be asked to come in for an exam. You may be tested for Lyme. You may also be prescribed antibiotics to help prevent infection.
- Over the next month, watch for the symptoms below, especially a rash at the site of the bite.

## When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider if you have any symptoms of Lyme disease. Call even if you don't remember being bitten. Symptoms include:

- A round, red rash (called a bull's-eye rash) at the site of the tick bite or another part of the body
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your provider
- Chills
- Tiredness or body aches
- Headache or a stiff neck
- Joint pain and swelling (arthritis), especially in large joints such as the knees

## To learn more

- [CDC, www.cdc.gov/lyme](https://www.cdc.gov/lyme)
- [American Lyme Disease Foundation, www.aldf.com](https://www.aldf.com)

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