

MAFES Dawg Tracks



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Lyme Disease Season in the U.S.



Lyme disease in the past has been, at best, a rarity in the South. However, with the growing herds of deer through our region, it is becoming more of a threat. Lyme disease is a bacterial infection caused by the bites of the deer tick. It is more common in the Northeast and north central states; the blacklegged tick is more common in the western states. The disease commonly happens during the summer months when ticks are more active. But later, symptoms of the untreated disease can show up at other times of the year.

I have a friend who contracted Lyme disease about four years ago while on a visit to New York State to visit his son-in-law, who is a game and fish officer in that area, and his daughter. He made a day trip with his son-in-law in a heavily wooded area and didn't check himself out after the trip. He returned to Mississippi and started having fever and joint aches. He was hospitalized for several weeks and now, after almost four years, he has to walk with a cane. Lyme disease cannot be transferred from person to person. Only ticks have been shown to be of any importance in Lyme disease transmission to humans.

Ticks do infect cats, dogs and horses. Ticks do not transmit Lyme disease directly to humans, but loose, infected ticks on the pet may cause a hazard to the owner. Chemical repellants or insecticides for pets can be useful. However, you should check with your veterinarian for his recommendation. Some products are highly toxic. It is important to check your pets daily for ticks.

PROPER TICK REMOVAL -

Removing ticks from humans or pets should be done correctly for obvious reasons. Following are some tips on doing so:

- Place fine-point tweezers around the tick's mouthparts, as close to the skin as possible, and pull gently. Sometimes the mouthparts of adult ticks remain, but don't get alarmed. The embedded parts won't cause Lyme disease.
- DO not try to burn it off or smother it with petroleum jelly or nail polish. DO NOT squeeze the tick's body.

- Wash your hands and then disinfect the tweezers and the bite with rubbing alcohol.
- If the tick is crawling, it has not fed or eaten and you have not been infected. If it is engorged with blood (full), it is possible that you could be infected. If symptoms appear, seek medical attention.

SYMPTOMS OF LYME DISEASE -

- A rash may develop in the first 48 hours after a bite, but this is not a symptom of Lyme disease.
- The characteristic bulls-eye rash of Lyme disease expands outward from the site of the bite beginning 3 to 30 days after the actual bite.
- A single rash may become quite large and may be accompanied by one or more scattered rashes on other areas of the skin. These rashes clear up rather quickly with antibiotic therapy.
- Some additional symptoms of Lyme disease are fever, headaches, aching in joints and muscles, and tiredness. All or some of these can accompany the rash.

The characteristic rash doesn't appear in all cases, so patients may not know that they have the disease. If the disease isn't treated in the early stages, it can cause other problems involving the heart, joints or nervous system as the disease progresses. The most common test for detecting Lyme disease is a laboratory test to reveal the antibodies. Antibodies are usually present in the blood in the chronic stages of Lyme disease, but in many cases aren't found in the early stages.

There is a newly developed immunization for Lyme disease for people between the ages of 15-70 years in the U.S. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends that decisions regarding vaccine use be made on the basis of assessment of individual risk, taking in account the geographic risk and a person's activities and behaviors relating to tick exposure.

Taking heed to the tips above on detection and removal of ticks will serve you well in protection from regular tick bites, as well as Lyme disease.