

A message from  
**Speaker of the Assembly  
Carl E. Heastie**



Dear Friend,

Lyme disease was first recognized in the U.S. in 1975, after a mysterious outbreak of arthritis symptoms near Lyme, Connecticut.

Since then, reports of Lyme disease have increased dramatically, and the disease has become a serious public health problem. Within the U.S., the highest incidence occurs in the Northeast, especially here in New York State.

This brochure provides important information about Lyme disease, as well as preventive steps you can take to reduce your chance of getting it and other tick-borne diseases. Lyme disease is treatable, but the long-term effects can be severe if left untreated.

Please don't hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions or comments about this or any other subject.

Sincerely,

Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker of the Assembly

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# Lyme disease

**What you need to know**



Courtesy of  
**Speaker of the Assembly  
Carl E. Heastie**

# Facts about Lyme disease

## What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that can produce skin, arthritic, neurological and even cardiac symptoms. You can become infected through the bite of a blacklegged tick (commonly known as a deer tick) that carries this bacteria. Not all blacklegged ticks are infected, but avoiding tick bites and removing a tick as soon as you find it can reduce the likelihood of contracting Lyme disease or any other disease the tick may be carrying.



Enlarged photo of an adult blacklegged (deer) tick

**Fact:** The actual size of an unengorged adult blacklegged (deer) tick is **about the size of a sesame seed.**

## What are some symptoms of Lyme disease?

Symptoms and their severity vary but usually start to appear 3 to 30 days after the bite of an infected tick. Early symptoms may be mild and easily overlooked. Often the first sign is a slowly expanding "bull's-eye" rash near the site of the tick bite. Symptoms may also be flu-like, including chills, fever, fatigue, headache, neck stiffness, jaw discomfort, pain or stiffness in muscles or joints. Untreated Lyme disease can progress to more severe symptoms, affecting the heart, liver or central nervous system.

## Is Lyme disease treatable?

Studies have shown that most cases of Lyme disease are treatable with antibiotics. The earlier treatment begins, the easier it is to prevent the long-term effects of the disease. If you develop a rash or flu-like symptoms, contact your health care provider immediately.

## Minimizing your risk:

- ▶ When in wooded or grassy areas, wear light-colored long pants and a long-sleeved shirt to make ticks easier to spot. Tuck pants into socks and shirts into pants. Avoid heavy vegetation – stay on well-traveled paths.
- ▶ Keep your lawn mowed, and avoid sitting directly on the ground or on stone walls.
- ▶ Stack woodpiles away from your house, remove leaf litter and clear brush around your house.
- ▶ Once indoors, do a thorough check of your clothes and your entire body, paying particular attention to the backs of knees, behind ears, the scalp and back. Take a bath or shower and put clothes in the dryer for 10 minutes.
- ▶ Place play equipment in sunny, dry areas of the yard, away from woods.
- ▶ Check your children and pets for attached or crawling ticks.
- ▶ Consider using EPA-registered insect repellents to reduce tick bites. Follow label instructions carefully and use sparingly.
- ▶ Ask your veterinarian which pet products reduce tick exposure. Dogs are very susceptible to tick bites.

**Myth:** Ticks fly, jump or drop from trees.

**Fact:** Blacklegged (deer) ticks get on humans and animals by direct contact. They live in shady, moist areas at ground level and cling to tall grass, brush and shrubs, about 18-24 inches off the ground. They can also be found in lawns and gardens, especially at the edges of woods and around stone walls. Once a tick gets on the skin, it usually climbs upward until it reaches a protected area of the body. Ticks can be active any time the temperature is above freezing.

**Myth:** Twisting or rotating an attached tick, burning it, applying alcohol or nail polish remover or "smothering" it with petroleum jelly are effective removal techniques.

**Fact:** These "tricks" may cause an embedded tick to regurgitate content from its stomach into the wound or burrow further in, increasing the chance of becoming infected with Lyme disease.

**Myth:** A past Lyme disease infection makes a person immune.

**Fact:** Lyme disease is a bacterial infection. Even if it has been successfully treated, a person may become re-infected if bitten later by another infected tick.



## How to remove an attached tick

Once on the skin, a tick generally crawls to a protected area, like inside and behind the ears, along the hairline, on the back of the neck, in the armpits, on the groin, on the legs, behind the knees or between the toes. If you find a tick attached to your skin, remove it as soon as possible. There are several tick removal devices on the market, but a plain set of pointed tweezers is suitable. The goal is to remove the tick without damaging it.

- ▶ Grasp the tick by the head or mouth as close to the skin's surface as possible.
- ▶ Steadily pull upward with firm, even pressure to avoid having the mouth parts break off in the skin. If they do break off, remove them with tweezers if possible.
- ▶ Dispose of the tick by putting it in a small container of rubbing alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag, wrapping it tightly in tape or flushing it down the toilet.
- ▶ Clean the bite area with rubbing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide or soap and water and wash your hands.

**Fact:** Lyme disease is the most common disease spread by ticks in New York. Ticks can also transmit other serious illnesses, like anaplasmosis, babesiosis, ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, hard tick relapsing fever and Powassan encephalitis. Visit [health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/lyme](http://health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/lyme) to learn more.