

## July 2010 Lyme Disease: What South Shore and Cape Cod Residents Should Know

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The map of reported Lyme disease cases in the United States shows coastal Massachusetts as one of the most dangerous areas in the country. And the incidence of Lyme disease is rising. We are running fourth in prevalence behind New Hampshire, Delaware and Connecticut. This is one race we don't want to win. Dr. Kimberly Melloni, Chief of Emergency Medicine at Jordan Hospital, answers some common questions about preventing, identifying and treating Lyme disease.

**Q: What can I do to prevent Lyme disease?**

Most commonly, Lyme disease is transmitted through deer tick bites. These ticks are often found on deer. The ticks love living in areas with shrubs, scattered leaves and tall grass.

The strongest prevention method involves covering your skin with tall socks, long pants and long sleeves. These are not exactly the preferred clothes of summer. Insect repellent with 20-30 percent DEET is effective against ticks but not recommended for infants less than two months old. And keep this stuff out of your eyes, nose and mouth. Be sure to wash repellent off your hands with soap and water before eating.

Perform a "tick check" when you get home. Ticks are often missed on the scalp and in the groin and armpit region. Put your clothing in the washer and dryer to kill any ticks that might have hopped on.

In your yard, keep shrubs and bushes away from play areas and equipment. Pest control companies can spray with acaricide in the spring to reduce the tick population. Barriers to prevent deer from entering your yard will further protect against ticks.

**Q: How do I know if I have Lyme disease?**

To get Lyme disease a tick has to have bitten you and been attached to your body for 24 hours or more. Lyme disease affects people differently. While some may have severe, long-term debilitating symptoms, others may not suffer from it at all.

About 70-80 percent of people infected with Lyme disease will develop the rash that starts at the site of the tick bite within a month after the bite. There may be a lesion, along with fever, tiredness and a headache. If not treated early, the infection can spread to other parts of the body and affect joints, the heart and the central nervous system.

**Q: How do I remove a tick if I see one on me?**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offers instruction on how to remove a tick: Remove a tick as soon as you notice it. Use fine-tipped tweezers to firmly grasp the tick very close to your skin. With a steady motion, pull the tick's body away from your skin. Then clean your skin with soap and warm water. Throw the dead tick away with your household trash.

Do not be alarmed if the tick's mouthparts remain in the skin. Once the mouthparts are removed from the rest of the tick, it can no longer transmit the Lyme disease bacteria.

**Q: How do doctors treat Lyme disease?**

A three-week to three month course of antibiotics is common. If bitten, talk with your doctor as soon as possible. A Lyme disease test has to be done two to three weeks *after* a suspected bite to get accurate results.

To learn more, visit the CDC's at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/Lyme/>. To reach the Emergency Department at Jordan Hospital, call 508-746-2800.