

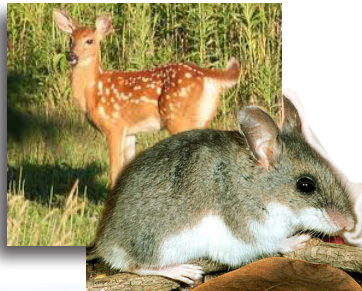


My CHILD Was Bitten by a TICK WHAT SHOULD I DO?

by Doug Puder, MD

Even if you've followed all of the advice Dr. Hamburg has given in the previous article, *Mosquitos and Ticks and Bees, Oh My!*, tick bites still occur and parents are worried about Lyme Disease.

❑ Let's review the life cycle of a tick, a story no-one could make up if they tried:



Ticks live for two years. They eat twice in their lives, seeking a blood meal from a mammal. The ticks wait in brush and wooded areas until their "host" brushes against them and then attach. They feed on the host mammal for over three days, become engorged with blood, drop off, and hibernate. In the first year they prefer a small mammal such as a mouse, and in their second year they prefer a larger mammal such as a deer. But they can't be too choosy, so they will feed on a human if they happen by. It is estimated that about half of the deer ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*) in our area carry the Lyme bacteria (*Borrelia Burgdorferi*). A tick will carry the bacteria in their GI tract and regurgitate it into their host just before dropping off (not a very nice host or hostess gift). In the first year, ticks (nymphs) are tiny (2mm) and harder to find. In their second year, ticks (adults) are larger and usually found.

❑ It's the tick you don't find that you have to worry about:



So if a tick is removed before the end of its blood meal, it will not transmit Lyme disease. Daily tick inspections should be effective in preventing most cases of Lyme disease. Remove ticks with tweezers by grabbing at the skin line and pulling back slowly until the tick releases. If you save the tick we can send it for identification, but testing the tick for Lyme bacteria is expensive and unnecessary.

❑ What am I watching out for?



Most children with Lyme disease come to us with a bullseye rash and no other symptoms. The rash appears 3 to 14 days after a tick has dropped off. If untreated it leads to fever, headache, and fatigue. After months it can give more serious problems such as meningitis, heart rhythm problems, and joint swelling. The joint swelling (not just pain) takes many months to develop and most often affects one knee.

❑ Is it curable? Should my child get antibiotics?



Yes, it is completely curable with antibiotics. Treatment is from 14 to 28 days depending on symptoms. Chronic Lyme disease does not appear to occur in children or adolescents, and prolonged antibiotic courses are not needed. Some recommend one tablet of doxycycline after a tick bite for children over age 8, but a full course of antibiotic adds only side-effects. If there is concern, a blood test can be performed 4 weeks later. There is no vaccine for Lyme disease.