

No. 539/2018

19 September 2018

Our Ref: E6/18

## **Lyme Disease and Tick Bites - Public Health England Warning - Steep Rise in Case Numbers:**

**To: All Branches**

Dear Colleagues,

Earlier this year Public Health England published worrying figures indicating a steep rise in Lyme disease cases showing a 35% rise in confirmed cases over the previous year.

The Health, Safety & Environment Department has had reported cases of members unfortunately falling victim to tick bites and suffering from the effects of nasty serious infection. We are therefore taking the opportunity once again to raise awareness of the risk and warn members to be aware and take appropriate precautions to avoid tick bites plus what to do in the event of being bitten.

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection transmitted to humans by tick bites. It's usually easier to treat if it's diagnosed early. The ticks themselves have to be infected with the bacteria in order to pass it on, and not all bites result in the condition, but the UK sees around 3,000 cases a year and the numbers are on the rise with a significant increase.

### **BBC Health Video – Ticks and Lyme disease**

**Watch this video:-** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/health-13447191/health-explained-what-is-lyme-disease>

### **High Risk Tick Areas in the UK**

UK areas known to have a particularly high population of ticks include Exmoor, the New Forest, the South Downs, the Lake District, the North York Moors, and the Scottish Highlands. Ticks are also relatively common in parts of Wiltshire, Berkshire, Surrey, West Sussex and Norfolk.

Lyme disease-carrying ticks can be found throughout the UK in urban parks and gardens as well as in the countryside. Typical habitats vary across Europe, but typically include deciduous and coniferous woodland, heathland, moorland, rough pasture, forests and urban parks. Ticks can also sometimes be found in private gardens, especially those with shady shrubberies or deep vegetation and a strong local wildlife population.

### **Symptoms of Lyme disease**

Many people with early symptoms of Lyme disease develop a circular red skin rash around a tick bite. One of the clearest signs of Lyme infection are characteristic "bulls eye" lesions around the site of a tick bite, although in some countries this is also caused by [a different type](#)

of tick-borne infection that requires different treatment. The rash can appear up to 3 months after being bitten by a tick and usually lasts for several weeks. Most rashes appear within the first 4 weeks. The rash is often described as looking like a bull's-eye on a dartboard. The skin will be red and the edges may feel slightly raised. Not everyone with Lyme disease gets the rash however. Some people also have flu-like symptoms in the early stages, such as:

- a high temperature, or feeling hot and shivery
- headaches
- muscle and joint pain
- tiredness and loss of energy

### **What are ticks?**

Ticks are related to spiders, mites and scorpions. There are many different species of tick living in Britain, each preferring to feed on the blood of different animal hosts. However they will bite humans. Ticks that may cause Lyme disease are found all over the UK, but high-risk areas include grassy and wooded areas in Southern England and the Scottish Highlands. It's very important to be aware of ticks and to safely remove them as soon as possible, just in case they are infected (see attached images).

### **How to spot and remove ticks**

Tick bites aren't always painful. You may not notice a tick unless you see it on your skin. Regularly check your skin and your children's or pets' skin after being outdoors.

#### **To remove a tick safely:**

- Use fine-tipped tweezers or a tick-removal tool – you can buy these from some pharmacies, vets and pet shops.
- Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible.
- Slowly pull upwards, taking care not to squeeze or crush the tick. Dispose of it when you've removed it.
- Clean the bite with antiseptic or soap and water.
- If you've been bitten by a tick or visited an area recently where infected ticks are found and you become unwell with flu-like symptoms – such as feeling hot and shivery, headaches, aching muscles or feeling sick, or a circular red rash develops – See a G.P. and don't delay. Tell the doctor that you've been in forests or grassy areas.

### **Treatment from your GP**

- Your GP will ask about your symptoms and consider any rash or recent tick bites you know about.
- Lyme disease can be difficult to diagnose. It has similar symptoms to other conditions and there is not always an obvious rash.
- Two types of blood test are available to help confirm or rule out Lyme disease. However, these tests are not always accurate in the early stages of the disease.
- You may need to be re-tested if you still have Lyme disease symptoms after a negative result.
- If your GP thinks you might have Lyme disease, they'll prescribe a 3-week course of antibiotics. It's important to finish the course, even if you start to feel better.
- Some people with severe symptoms will be referred to a specialist in hospital for injections of stronger antibiotics.
- Most people with Lyme disease get better after antibiotic treatment. This can take months for some people, but the symptoms should improve over time.
- People with symptoms of Lyme disease that last a long time after treatment may be referred to a specialist in hospital for advice and more blood tests.
- Call 111 If you can't speak to your G.P. and don't know what to do next.

### **Ongoing symptoms**

A few people who are diagnosed and treated for Lyme disease continue to have symptoms – like tiredness, aches and loss of energy – that can last for years. These symptoms are often

compared to 'Fibromyalgia' and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. It's not clear why this happens to some people and not others. This means there is also no agreed treatment. Speak to your doctor if your symptoms come back after treatment with antibiotics or don't start to improve.

### **Important**

Don't take up online website offers of tests and treatment for Lyme disease. Speak to your doctor for advice before buying tests or treatments online.

### **How to avoid tick bites**

To reduce the risk of being bitten:

- Cover your skin while walking outdoors in the countryside and tuck your trousers into your socks.
- Use insect repellent on your clothes and skin – products containing DEET are best.
- Stick to paths whenever possible.
- Wear light-coloured clothing so ticks are easier to spot and brush off.

### **Lyme Disease facts**

- Lyme disease is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium [Borrelia burgdorferi](#).
- It can be transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected tick.
- It has a clinical diagnosis.
- It cannot be confidently ruled out by any current test.
- It can be difficult to diagnose
- Lyme disease symptoms overlap with those of many other diseases.
- Early symptoms may include headache, fatigue, fever, [facial palsy](#) and a skin rash called [erythema migrans](#).
- It may spread to affect the whole body including eyes, joints, heart and brain.
- If inadequately treated or treated late, it may be difficult to cure.
- Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics.
- Lyme disease was named in 1975, after a number of cases occurred in Old Lyme, Connecticut, USA.
- Lyme disease is not a new disease, it was known in Europe under different names in the early 20th century and was carried by Neolithic "Ötzi the Iceman".
- Lyme disease is not spelt Lymes disease, Limes disease or Lime disease.
- Lyme disease may also be called Lyme Borreliosis.
- Lyme disease-carrying ticks can be found throughout the UK in urban parks and gardens as well as in the countryside.
- Lyme disease has lots of unknowns, see [JLA Process](#).

### **Attachments:**

- Ticks & Lyme Disease Leaflet
- Lyme Disease Poster 1
- Lyme Disease Poster 3
- Tick Images

Yours sincerely



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