OUR GP+

Information for patients, families and carers

Tick bites and Lyme disease

Removing a tick safely, early signs of Lyme disease, and when to get help.

What are ticks and Lyme disease?

Ticks are tiny spider-like creatures, often no bigger than a poppy seed, living in long grass, bracken, woodland, moorland, parks and gardens. They climb on as you brush past and feed on blood for a few days. **Most bites are harmless**, but some ticks carry bacteria that cause **Lyme disease**. It is treated with antibiotics and most people recover fully. It does not spread between people.

Signs of Lyme disease to look out for

- A spreading rash around the bite, usually 1 to 4 weeks later
- Red, purple or darker than the skin around it; harder to see on brown or black skin
- Flu-like illness: temperature, headache, tiredness, aching muscles or joints
- The rash grows bigger than 5 cm, often round, and may look like a bull's-eye
- The rash is usually not itchy, hot or painful, even as it keeps spreading
- Not everyone gets a rash or remembers being bitten

A small red, itchy bump that appears straight after the bite and fades within 2 days is a normal reaction, not Lyme disease.

Found a tick? Remove it quickly and safely

Use the right tool
Fine-tipped tweezers or a tick removal tool (tick twister or tick card).

Grip close to the skin
Hold the tick by its head, as close to the skin as you can. Don't squeeze its body.

Pull slowly upwards
Pull steadily away from the skin. With a tick twister, follow its own instructions.

Don't burn or smother
No matches, Vaseline, alcohol or nail varnish. These can make things worse.

Clean up
Wash the bite with soap and water, then wash your hands.

Then keep watch
Note the date and check the bite for 4 weeks. No antibiotics if you are well.

Who is more likely to be bitten

Ticks are most active from spring to autumn. You are more likely to be bitten if you:

walk, hike or camp · **work outdoors on farms, forests or estates** · **walk a dog** · **garden or play in long grass** · **visit areas with deer or sheep** · **leave a tick on for longer**

Good news Most tick bites never cause illness. Removing a tick quickly lowers the risk, and Lyme disease caught early is treated with a course of antibiotic tablets.

Please turn over: avoiding bites, treatment and when to get help →

How you can help: avoiding tick bites

Cover up
Long sleeves and trousers tucked into socks. Light colours make ticks easier to spot.

Use a repellent
One that works against ticks, such as DEET. Follow the label, especially for children.

Stick to paths
Keep away from long grass, bracken and overgrown plants where ticks wait.

Check your skin
At the end of the day: armpits, groin, waistband, behind knees, under straps.

Check children
Ticks often bite children on the head, neck, scalp and hairline.

Clothes and pets
Brush off clothes before going inside, and check dogs so ticks aren't brought home.

What the doctor will do

1. Ask about the bite, where you had been and when symptoms began
2. Look at any rash: the typical Lyme rash needs no blood test
3. Arrange a blood test if there is no rash; it may need repeating
4. Prescribe antibiotic tablets, usually for 3 weeks

Tell the GP the date of the bite, show a photo of the rash, and mention travel abroad, pregnancy and any allergies. Children may be discussed with a specialist.

Taking antibiotics for Lyme disease

Finish the course. Take every dose, even when you feel better. Doxycycline or amoxicillin are the usual choices.

Doxycycline tips. Take it with a full glass of water, sitting or standing up. Cover up and use sunscreen, as it can make skin burn easily.

Feeling worse at first? Some people get a short flare of fever, aches and headache in the first day. Keep taking the tablets and contact us. Get help at once for a rash with hives, swelling or breathing problems.

Call 999 if

someone has a severe headache with a stiff neck or dislike of bright light, a fit, sudden confusion or weakness, chest pain, fainting, or severe breathlessness.

Contact us the same day if

a rash spreads out from a tick bite; you get a flu-like illness in the weeks after a bite or time outdoors; one side of the face droops; you have new numbness, tingling or nerve pain; a swollen painful joint; a racing or irregular heartbeat or dizziness; or the bite becomes hot, swollen and sore.

Getting better: most people recover fully after antibiotics. Tiredness and aches can take weeks or months to settle. Tell us if symptoms don't improve or come back. Having Lyme disease once doesn't protect you, so keep avoiding tick bites.

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Out of hours: NHS 24 on 111
More help: lymediseaseaction.org.uk
Emergency: 999

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