

Preventing Tick Bites and Lyme disease

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In Minnesota, there are about a dozen different types of ticks. Not all of them spread disease. Three types that people may come across in Minnesota are the blacklegged tick (aka deer tick), the American dog tick (aka wood tick), and the lone star tick. The blacklegged tick causes by far the most tick borne disease in Minnesota. People in Minnesota are often bitten by American dog ticks but they rarely spread diseases. Black legged or deer ticks are very small and sometimes difficult to see. For information and visuals of the ticks most commonly found in MN go

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/tickborne/ticks.html>

Lyme disease is the most common vector-borne disease in the United States with more than 200,000 cases reported in the United States annually. There are steps you can take to protect yourself and your family. Tick exposure can occur year-round, but ticks are most active during warmer months

Lyme disease in the United States is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and rarely, *Borrelia mayonii*. It is transmitted to humans through the bite of infected blacklegged (aka deer) ticks. Typical symptoms include fever, headache, fatigue, and a characteristic bulls-eye shaped skin rash. If left untreated, infection can spread to joints, the heart, and the nervous system. Lyme disease is diagnosed based on symptoms, physical findings (e.g., rash), and the possibility of exposure to infected ticks. Most cases of Lyme disease can be treated successfully with a few weeks of antibiotics. Steps to prevent Lyme disease include using insect repellent, removing ticks promptly and reducing tick habitat.

Using EPA registered insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, para-menthane-diol or 2-undecanone is a good first line of defense if you are going to be out in areas where ticks like to live. Ticks live in grassy, brushy areas with tall grass or wooded areas. They can also live in your own yard or neighborhood. Ticks may be carried into the house on clothing or your pets. Wearing long pants tucked into your socks, a long sleeve shirt and a hat can help prevent a tick from attaching while you are outdoors. Also try staying on trails and avoid walking through tall grassy or heavily wooded areas. For your own yard, mow your lawn regularly and clear brush and leaves where ticks may like to live.

Any ticks that are found should be removed promptly. You should carefully examine clothing. Only a minority of tick bites lead to Lyme disease. CDC states that a tick must be attached for 36 to 48 hours or more before the Lyme disease bacterium can be transmitted. Ticks can attach to any part of the human body but are often found in hard to see areas such as the groin, armpits and scalp. It is best to remove the tick as soon as possible to reduce your chances of getting an infection from the bite. Don't use nail polish, petroleum jelly or a hot match to make tick detach. Use a fine tip tweezer to grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible and pull upward with steady even pressure to remove the tick. Clean the bite area and your hands with soap and water when done with removal. For a video of how to remove a tick <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/tickborne/prevention.html>

Untreated Lyme disease can produce a wide range of symptoms and for that reason; it can be difficult to diagnosis. Early symptoms can include fever, chills, headache, fatigue, body aches and most commonly a rash may appear in the area of infection. The rash often appears in a bull's eye type pattern with possibly a white center originating at the site of the tick bite. The rash may begin within 3 to 30 days with the average around day 7 from the bite. It is important to see your healthcare provider if you develop any of these symptoms with a few weeks of removing a tick or spending time in a tick habitat.

People treated with antibiotics in the early stages usually recover quickly and completely. Your healthcare provider will decide what antibiotic will be best for you to use. You can get Lyme disease again if you are bitten so it is important to always protect yourself and your family from potential tick bites. More information can be found at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) and [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org)