How prevalent is Lyme disease in our area?

Western Pennsylvania is a hotspot for Lyme disease in the U.S. Deer ticks can be found in high numbers here because of our forests and wooded areas, which are their natural habitat.

What are symptoms of Lyme disease?

The classic characteristic of Lyme disease is a red, spreading rash, though not everyone will have the “bull’s-eye” mark (seen at right). This rash may be a sign of the disease’s early stages. Other symptoms can include fatigue, chills, fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, and swollen lymph nodes. (These nodes are an important part of the immune system and can be found in the groin, armpit, neck, and other areas of the body.) But without the bull’s-eye rash or finding an attached tick, these symptoms are nonspecific and could also indicate another condition, like a viral infection.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

See your child’s health care provider if you’re worried that your child has contracted Lyme disease. There’s a screening test and a second more specific test that will determine whether your child has it. The bull’s-eye rash is enough reason for a doctor to prescribe treatment, though. Typical treatment is 10-14 days of standard antibiotics. There’s no evidence of Lyme disease persisting after routine antibiotic therapy. Current research is targeted at making Lyme a vaccine-preventable disease.

How can people prevent Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is easy to prevent. Regularly and carefully inspect children’s bodies for ticks, especially after they’ve been in an area where they could have been exposed to them. Just finding a tick on your child’s body does not mean that it has transmitted the bacterium that causes Lyme disease. The tick has to be attached for 36-72 hours to have the opportunity to transmit the disease.

When your children are in a high-density tick area, have them wear clothing that minimizes the areas where a tick can latch onto their skin. Tuck long pants into socks. Wear long sleeves. Also use insect repellent to decrease the chance of being exposed to ticks or other bothersome insects.

There’s a lot of fear about Lyme disease. It’s helpful to remember that, with the proper care, it’s totally preventable and treatable.
The number of positive Lyme disease tests reported to Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) has increased dramatically in recent years. Ticks that transmit Lyme disease, known as blacklegged ticks or deer ticks, are now found throughout the county.

**Figure 1:** Relative sizes of several ticks at different life stages. In general, adult ticks are approximately the size of a sesame seed and nymphal ticks are approximately the size of a poppy seed. *Ixodes scapularis*, known as a deer tick or blacklegged tick (from the CDC website: [http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/transmission/blacklegged.html](http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/transmission/blacklegged.html))

Not all deer ticks are infected with the bacterium that causes Lyme disease, but many are, so it is best to avoid tick bites or prolonged tick attachment by following the guidelines below. Ticks only transmit the bacterium that causes Lyme disease if attached for more than 36 hours.

- If going to wooded or grassy areas, wear long sleeves and long pants if possible. Tuck pants into socks. Minimize exposed skin. Wear light colored clothes so you can see ticks.
- Use repellent with DEET on exposed skin and clothes or product containing permethrin on boots, clothing, and camping gear.
- Shower within two hours of coming inside.
- Check skin for ticks.
- Check skin of kids and pets for ticks.
- To remove a tick, grasp it with tweezers at the point of attachment as close to the skin as possible and pull straight up with steady pressure. Do not test or jerk the tick (see drawing below). If mouth parts remain in the skin, remove them with clean tweezers if easy—otherwise let skin heal. Thoroughly clean bite area with rubbing alcohol or soap and water. Flush tick down the toilet or place in sealed container.

**Figure 2.** Preferred method for removing a tick (from the CDC website: [http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/removal/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/removal/index.html))

If you have been bitten by a tick and notice a bull's-eye rash or flu-like symptoms (fatigue, chills, fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, and swollen lymph nodes) within 30 days, seek medical care. Many people who develop Lyme disease do not realize they have been bitten, so do not hesitate to seek care if you have symptoms of Lyme disease, even if you are not aware of a tick bite.

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**Fun Fruit Kabobs**

**Ingredients:**
- 1 cup whole strawberries
- 1 cup pineapple chunks
- 1 cup cubed cantaloupe
- 1 cup cubed honeydew
- 1 cup grapes
- 1 cup Greek nonfat vanilla yogurt

**Directions:**
1. Children can prepare fruit by washing strawberries and grapes and placing them in a colander to dry. Children can also wash the melon rinds.
2. Have an adult cut pineapple and melon into chunks.
3. Next, have children place fruit in separate bowls and use a spatula to scoop yogurt into another bowl.
4. Using wooden Popsicle sticks, plastic straws, or coffee stirrers as skewers, have each children slide pieces of fruit onto the skewer to design their own kabob.
5. Use yogurt as a dip for kabobs.

Nutrition per serving:
100 calories, 0 grams fat, 22 grams carbohydrate, 4 grams protein, 2 g dietary fiber, 15 mg sodium. Recipe makes 8 servings.

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