

Ticks and Lyme Disease

You and your dog may be at risk from Lyme Disease when you visit the countryside. Lyme Disease is a relatively uncommon infection, but it has recently started to occur more frequently. It is caused by a bacterium carried by ticks. People who walk in the countryside, especially those walking through long grass, bracken, rough vegetation or wild areas such as heathland, are most at risk. This describes some simple precautions which you should take when you visit the countryside.

What is Lyme Disease ?

- § Lyme Disease is an infection which can affect the skin and occasionally cause serious illness of the nervous system, joints or heart.
- § It is caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium, transmitted by the bite of an infected tick.
- § Ticks are tiny spider-like creatures which live in woodland, moorland and grassy areas. Unlike spiders, however, they press themselves close to the skin of the host as they crawl.
- § The highest risk was thought to be from April to October when the tick was most active and feeding, but research has now shown that, in certain areas, ticks may be active most of the year.

Can it be prevented ?

- § Yes. The ticks cling to ends of vegetation and wave their legs around hoping to latch on to a passing animal or person - so your first defence is to keep your skin covered and avoid brushing against vegetation.
- § If a tick attaches itself to your clothing, it may crawl around for some time before making contact with your skin.
- § Wear long trousers, tucked into socks if possible, and long-sleeved shirts.
- § Light coloured clothes will help you spot ticks and brush them off.
- § Inspect for ticks every few hours and, if possible, at the end of your day's outdoor activity, undress and completely check your body for ticks.
- § Insect repellents on clothing and repellent collars for pets may help.

What if I am bitten ?

- § Don't panic but remove the tick as soon as possible. They will crawl about your before biting, not every tick carries Lyme Disease and not every bite will transmit the disease even if the tick is infected and not removed
- § An infected tick will not usually pass on the infection until it is fully engorged with blood.
- § Remove the tick as soon as possible by grasping it close to the skin with tweezers. Apply gentle pressure, twisting anti-clockwise upwards, repeating if necessary. Part of the tick may remain embedded, but you will have prevented the tick transferring the infection to you. (Save the tick in a sealed container in case you develop symptoms later).

Should I see my Doctor ?

- § The disease may first show itself as an expanding reddish, round rash (*erythema migrans*) in the area of the bite. This rash starts three to thirty days later.
- § Early symptoms may resemble influenza ('flu), with swollen glands near the site, mild headaches, aching muscles and joints, and tiredness.

If left untreated, the disease may develop over months and even years, when facial muscle weakness, meningitis-like symptoms, and/or arthritis symptoms may occur.

If you have any of these symptoms and you suspect that you may have been bitten by a tick, **inform your Doctor**. Lyme Disease is treatable with antibiotics and the earlier it is diagnosed, the better.

