

Tick Bites

Ticks are small insects that attach and burrow a portion of their heads under the surface of a person's skin in order to feed. Although there are various types of ticks, only the tiny "deer tick" spreads Lyme disease—a bacterial infection that can cause many long-term complications if not treated early. Ticks in the Western regions of the United States rarely carry the Lyme disease bacteria, which is more common in the Eastern regions. Additionally, most ticks do not carry diseases, and most tick bites do not cause serious health problems. However, it is important to remove a tick as soon as you discover one to avoid any possible tick-borne diseases and skin infection.



Lyme disease causing bacteria and "Deer Tick" Courtesy: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Symptoms

Many of the diseases ticks carry cause flu-like symptoms in people. With Lyme disease, early symptoms include a red, "bull's-eye" rash with a white center around the bite accompanied by flu-like symptoms, such as fever, fatigue, headache, and muscle aches. This rash may not appear until two weeks after the bite from the tick. A rash occurring within three days of the bite is usually due to a reaction from the head parts left in the skin after removal of the tick and is not a sign of Lyme disease. If antibiotic medications are taken early on when symptoms first appear, they can prevent later complications. Complications include arthritis, heart problems, and prolonged illness. Ticks that are removed within 48 hours do not generally pose a health risk.

Prevention

To prevent ticks from attaching to your skin, tuck your pant legs into your socks. Also, apply insect repellent containing DEET. Apply DEET to your clothing as well as the exposed areas of your skin. However, be careful not to apply the repellent near your eyes or mouth or on children's hands, since children often put their hands in their mouths. Remember to wash the repellent off with soap and water once you are indoors.

Home Treatment

Check regularly for ticks when you are in areas where there may be ticks. Carefully examine both your skin and scalp once you return home. Check your pets, too. If you find ticks, remove them by gently pulling them off with tweezers. Grasp as close to the mouth of the tick as possible and pull straight out. Do not twist or "unscrew" the

tick. Do not handle the tick with your bare hands. Save the tick in a jar for later identification, in case you develop symptoms of Lyme disease. Removing the tick before it finishes feeding (within 48 hours) generally prevents the Lyme disease bacteria from being passed on to the person or pet.

After the tick is removed, wash the area of the bite with large amounts of warm water and soap. Remember also to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Use of an antibiotic ointment has not been shown to affect healing.

When to Call Kaiser Permanente

You should call if you had a tick attached for more than 24 hours; if a rash develops more than three days after you remove the tick; and/or if you develop flu-like symptoms more than three days after tick removal.

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Use these Kaiser Permanente resources for reliable health information:

- ❖ Connect to our Web site at **members.kp.org**. Search the site for “Lyme Disease” and “Ticks”.
- ❖ Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- ❖ Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

To get your free handbook, call 1-800-464-4000.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.