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Questions and Answers

Lyme Disease: What You Should Know

Kingsford and Iron River, Michigan, May 2017 - **What is Lyme disease?** Lyme disease is caused by infection with *Borrelia* bacteria following a bite from an infected tick.

How common is Lyme disease? Lyme disease is endemic to North America, Europe, Russia and China. It is the most common tick-borne disease in the United States. The Northeast/Mid-Atlantic coast, as well as areas of the upper Midwest, accounted for more than nine out of 10 cases reported in 2013 in the United States with the total number of cases reported numbering around 20,000.

How is Lyme disease spread, and who is at risk for it? Lyme disease is transmitted by the bite of infected ticks, mainly blacklegged (deer) ticks. The majority of transmissions occur following bites by immature ticks or nymphs. Due to the lifecycle of ticks, the majority of infections occur in the spring and summer months. Lyme disease is not transmitted from person to person. While infection during pregnancy may cause an infection of the placenta that result in stillbirth, no recognizable pattern of congenital Lyme infection has been identified.

What are the signs and symptoms of Lyme disease? Symptoms of Lyme disease differ based on how long ago the tick bite occurred. Early stages include the appearance of a rash that typically looks like a red bull's-eye. Other symptoms can include flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, and fatigue. Only about seven or eight people out of 10 who are infected will develop a rash. If left untreated, other symptoms can include additional rashes, pain and swelling in joints, loss of muscle control in the face, severe headaches, and heart palpitations. Some of these symptoms will resolve themselves; however, severe complications, such as arthritis and joint pain, may be prolonged if left untreated.

Can Lyme disease be treated? A variety of tests are available to detect Lyme disease, so people should consult their doctor if they believe they may have it. Lyme disease can be treated by antibiotics and, if caught early, usually leads to a full recovery.

Is there a Lyme disease vaccine? From 1998 to 2002 there was an approved vaccine for Lyme disease in the United States. Though the vaccine was safe and was able to prevent infection in 10 out of 10 children and almost eight out of 10 adults, the vaccine was removed from the market due to low demand. The low demand resulted from reports linking the vaccine with risk of arthritis or development of autoimmunity. However, these reports were investigated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and no unusual connection was found between

the vaccine and development of these side effects. Unfortunately, because of low sales and unfounded safety concerns, people in the United States can no longer protect themselves from Lyme disease by vaccination.

How can Lyme disease be prevented? In many cases, a tick must be attached for 36 to 48 hours before the bacteria is transmitted. Thus, one of the best ways to prevent Lyme disease is to check for ticks immediately after being outdoors, especially in forested areas. Other preventative measures include wearing long sleeves and pants to prevent attachment of ticks, using insecticides that contain DEET and treating clothing with permethrin, an insect repellent.

Under certain circumstances, the tick can be tested. Please contact the Health Department for further information at 779-7239.

Source: The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Vaccine Education Center, Volume 2, Fall 2016

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