

TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Out-Patient Clinic

100 Old Billerica Road, Bedford MA 01730

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TICK TALK

By Susan Cusson, NP



With all the cold rainy weather we had this spring it seemed at times like summer just wasn't going to happen, but here it is in full bloom. With the warmer weather people get more active and so do deer ticks. Experts are predicting one of the worst years ever for ticks. While Lyme is the most prevalent disease transmitted by deer ticks, it's not the only one. A rare but potentially life threatening disease called Powassan virus is also transmitted by ticks. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 75 cases have been reported in the northeast and Midwest over the past decade. By comparison, the number of cases of Lyme disease reported exceeds 250,000 in the same time frame and same region. Warmer winters have led to an increased tick population, so experts predict rising tick-borne infections of many types including Lyme and Powassan.

Since Lyme disease is so widespread in this area, it warrants the most attention. The incubation period for Lyme disease is 3 to 30 days after a bite from an infected tick. During the first few weeks of infection, blood tests are not sensitive and therefore not helpful in diagnosing Lyme disease. During this stage, treatment with antibiotics can be initiated solely on the clinical exam finding of erythema migrans (EM). EM occurs in 70–80% of patients with Lyme disease. EM rashes generally expand slowly over a few days after which they may develop a “bull’s-eye” appearance consisting of a red ring with central clearing.



If you ever notice a rash of this type, even if you haven't been aware of a tick bite, seek medical attention. Antibiotics will kill the Lyme disease bacteria in most cases, but you need to catch it early. If early localized Lyme disease isn't treated, the disease can spread throughout the body affecting the heart, brain and nervous system. Diagnosis and treatment of chronic Lyme disease is controversial. Some medical professionals don't recognize it as a real diagnosis. Folks who suffer from an array of chronic symptoms related to Lyme disease would argue otherwise. Consultation with an infectious disease specialist is recommended if chronic Lyme disease is suspected.

The very best way to avoid infection altogether is by knowing how to prevent tick bites. Apply insect repellent with DEET or picaridin to clothing and skin, wear light-colored clothing, ideally long pants tucked into socks. You can also treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants and socks with products containing permethrin. Follow product instructions carefully. It remains protective through several washings. Pre-treated clothing is available and may be protective longer. Most importantly, always check thoroughly for ticks after you spend time outdoors, ideally within two hours. To be safe you can also tumble dry clothes on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors.

What's the best way to remove a tick if you do find one attached? An internet search will turn up plenty of suggestions, some you'll want to avoid. Do not apply cream, Vaseline, oil or a burnt match to the tick. These methods are ineffective.

