

# TAKING THE BITE OUT OF LYME DISEASE

*Introducing the U.S. charity that is tackling this growing public health concern head on*



Everyone has a tick story – sitting in the bath and identifying a new ‘mole’, running through the fields and emerging with an unwelcome passenger. But these tiny creatures are a lot more dangerous than you might think. Tick-borne illnesses are a persistent and growing public health risk, especially in regions with dense woodlands, tall grass and humid climates. The most well-known of these is Lyme disease, but ticks can also transmit other serious conditions, including Rocky Mountain spotted fever, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis, babesiosis and Powassan virus.

All of these illnesses are caused by pathogens – bacteria, viruses, or parasites – that are passed to humans through the bite of infected ticks. Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is transmitted by the black-legged tick (or deer tick) in the northeastern, mid-Atlantic and north-central United States. Symptoms begin around three to 30 days after a tick bite and may include fever, fatigue, headaches, muscle and joint aches and a characteristic *bull's-eye* rash known as erythema migrans.

Diagnosing tick-borne illnesses can be incredibly complicated. Blood tests are routinely used, but early in the infection false negatives are common, especially for Lyme disease. On occasion and depending on the circumstances, diagnosis is based on clinical symptoms and known tick exposure, particularly when a rash is present. In other cases, numerous rounds of testing and specialist



Wendy Phillips

referrals may be required. Treatment often involves antibiotics such as doxycycline or amoxicillin, especially for bacterial infections like Lyme disease and anaplasmosis. However, if not caught early, treatment can become complex and prolonged. Chronic Lyme disease – or post-treatment Lyme disease syndrome (PTLDS) – can cause persistent symptoms that last months or years, even after initial treatment.

Financially, tick-borne illnesses can also be enormously problematic. While early-stage Lyme disease might be treated with a short course of antibiotics costing a few hundred dollars, late-stage or chronic Lyme disease can lead to years of testing, specialist visits and treatments that may cost tens of thousands. Being a mostly States-born phenomenon, many patients are at the mercy of insurance companies whose coverage is variable – a significant number of patients have reported struggling to afford care, particularly for long term or experimental treatments. A combination of awareness, prevention and prompt medical attention following a tick bite are crucial to reducing the impact of these potentially life-altering infections.

Since its foundation in 2019, The Lyme Treatment Foundation has stood at the forefront of research concerning this debilitating disease. The volunteer-led nonprofit has made a profound impact by providing vital medical support to patients who are often



left to navigate a confusing and costly healthcare landscape by themselves. With more than \$800,000 raised to date, the foundation has awarded hundreds of grants for medical testing and treatment across the U.S., Canada, Germany and the UK.

The foundation was created by Wendy Phillips, who experienced firsthand the devastating toll of these diseases and the financial barriers to treatment experienced by so many. Her personal struggle inspired a transformative mission: to make Lyme disease treatment a reality for all who need it. Under her leadership, the foundation has distributed critical medical grants all over the country, while also leading strong advocacy and education efforts. Their impressive work has reached U.S. senators and congress members, pushing for better healthcare access and policy changes surrounding Lyme and tick-borne diseases and getting the issue front and centre to ensure better provisions for future generations.

As well as advocating for improved access and financial support, the Lyme Treatment Foundation has also been enormously impactful in the scientific research that fuels progress. In 2021, the specialists launched a biomedical research initiative and began funding studies in collaboration with institutions like the University of Oxford, helping to further understanding of these complex and damaging illnesses. Strategic partnerships – including with the Avril Lavigne Foundation – have amplified their fundraising and awareness campaigns, broadening their reach and allowing the organisation to continue expanding its services.



Through their provision of both financial aid and educational resources, the Lyme Treatment Foundation has played a pivotal role in the empowerment of patients and families; transforming lives and shifting the tide in the fight against tick-borne diseases. Their commitment ensures that more people receive timely diagnosis and treatment, regardless of financial circumstances – offering real hope in the face of a growing public health challenge.

To find out more about the important work undertaken by Lyme Treatment Foundation, visit [www.lymetreatmentfoundation.org](http://www.lymetreatmentfoundation.org).