

LYME DISEASE

Lyme disease is caused by bacteria called *Borrelia burgdorferi*, and rarely, *Borrelia mayonii*. The bacteria are spread to people through the bites of infected blacklegged ticks.

Under a microscope, the Lyme disease bacteria are corkscrew shaped.

Where People Most Commonly Get Lyme Disease

People can only get Lyme disease from ticks that carry the bacteria. In high-risk areas, about 10–50% of blacklegged ticks carry the bacteria. These high-risk areas include:

- Eastern states, primarily New England and the mid-Atlantic.
- The Great Lakes Region and Northern Midwestern states, especially Wisconsin and Minnesota.
- West Coast, particularly parts of northern California and, less commonly, Oregon and Washington.

Transmission

Ticks need to be attached for more than 24 hours and begin filling with blood before they can transmit (spread) Lyme disease bacteria. Most people are infected through the bites of immature ticks called nymphs. Nymphs are tiny (less than 2 mm) and difficult to see. They most commonly bite during spring and summer.

Adult ticks can also transmit Lyme disease bacteria. They are more likely to be found and removed because they are bigger than nymphs. They most commonly bite during the fall.

There is no evidence that Lyme disease is transmitted from person-to-person through touching, kissing, or having sex with a person who has Lyme disease. Untreated Lyme disease during pregnancy can lead to infection of the placenta. Spread from mother to fetus is possible, but rare. Fortunately, with appropriate antibiotic treatment, there is no increased risk of adverse birth outcomes. If you are pregnant and suspect you may have Lyme disease, contact your healthcare provider. There are no reports of Lyme disease transmission through breast milk or blood transfusion.



Blacklegged ticks don't just have black legs! They are a different species than other common ticks, like the dog tick. In their larval and nymphal stages, blacklegged ticks are no bigger than a pinhead. Adults are larger, about the size of a sesame seed. (Left to right: larva, nymph, adult male, adult female)