

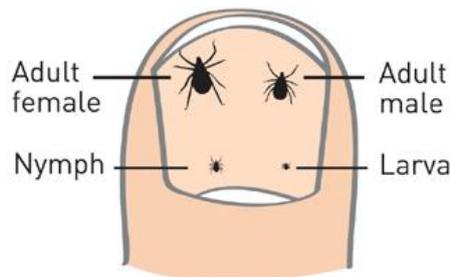
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	Tick Bites and Lyme Disease	Issue Date: 23/05/14	Author: Steve Milroy

(To be posted on HSQE Notice Boards for a Period of 1 MONTH from date of issue)

Changes in farming practices and the climate mean that there are more ticks in our countryside and urban areas.

Lyme disease is an illness caused by being bitten by a tick that is infected with a germ called borrelia (which usually lives in certain animals such as mice, some birds and some other small animals). The first and typical symptom is usually a rash that spreads out from the site of the tick bite. Left untreated the germs can spread and in some cases this can cause serious symptoms – often months after the initial tick bite. Ticks are second only to mosquitoes for carrying disease to humans.

Background



Ticks are small insect-like creatures about the size of a pinhead. Ticks cannot fly or jump, but climb onto humans from long grass or foliage. Ticks can be found in woods, forests and fields in the countryside and sometimes in parks and gardens in towns where there is lots of wildlife. Ticks are more abundant late spring and early summer, and again during autumn (however they can also be active in winter months if it is mild enough). They feed by biting the skin and sucking blood and if an infected tick bites a human the bacterium may be passed into the human. Ticks excrete a numbing substance onto the skin so you will not feel it biting!



Symptoms of Lyme Disease may include:

Flu-like symptoms. Extreme fatigue. Muscle/Joint pain. Muscle weakness. Upset digestive system. Headache. Disturbances of the nervous system. Poor sleep. Sometimes a 'Bull's eye' rash.

Actions Required

- Protection against infection is best achieved by wearing long sleeve clothing, tucking trousers into socks, and using insect repellents containing DEET
- Check for ticks on your skin following a visit to a potential tick area (ticks like warm places on the body, like the back of the knee, belly button, armpits, buttocks and groin area)
- If any ticks are found, remove them with a tick removal device (example shown above left) or pointed tweezers at the point where they have latched on as close to the skin as possible – pull steadily upwards and avoid squeezing their body as this could cause them to regurgitate before you remove them. The longer the tick remains attached to the person's skin, the greater the risk of catching the disease, especially if it is there for more than 24 hours (once engorged with blood, which usually takes 24 – 48 hours, the bacteria then travels up from their stomach and into your skin)

N.B If no tools are available, rather than delay use a **cotton thread**. Tie a single loop of cotton around the tick's mouthparts, as close to the skin as possible, then pull upwards and outwards without twisting.

- After removal of the tick, apply an antiseptic to the bite site
- Wash hands thoroughly and disinfect any tools used
- If bitten, or you suspect that you may have been bitten, report to your supervisor and visit your GP

Successful treatment (particularly if diagnosed early) is usually by a course of antibiotics.

Note: most ticks in the UK are **not** infected by the bacterium that causes Lyme Disease so if you are bitten there is only a low risk that you will contract the disease.