

THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW

...that while I always mention something about ticks and Lyme disease every month, the fact that every disease report I have received from the Department of Public Health lately has been about another person having a confirmed diagnosis of Lyme disease or another of the tick or vector-borne diseases; brings me to the need for writing a more detailed article again.

The first point I want to make clear is that it doesn't make any difference as to where in our Town of Merrimac that you live, those pesky little ticks—no bigger than a pencil dot—make it an equal opportunity possibility to be bitten and infected with one of the several diseases linked to a tick bite.

I do invite everyone to visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Lyme disease website at <http://www.cdc.gov/lyme>. There is a wealth of information there but since I know not everyone has access to the internet, I'll give you some of the "need to know" highlights that will hopefully keep you safe and knowledgeable. In fact, I'm copying and pasting what appears when you open the address above:

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium [Borrelia burgdorferi](#) and is [transmitted](#) to humans by the bite of infected blacklegged ticks. Typical [symptoms](#) include fever, headache, fatigue, and a characteristic skin rash called [erythema migrans](#). If left untreated, infection can spread to joints, the heart, and the nervous system. Lyme disease is [diagnosed](#) based on symptoms, physical findings (e.g., rash), and the possibility of exposure to infected ticks; laboratory testing is helpful in the later stages of disease. Most cases of Lyme disease can be [treated](#) successfully with a few weeks of antibiotics. Steps to [prevent](#) Lyme disease include using insect repellent, removing ticks promptly, landscaping, and integrated pest management. The ticks that transmit Lyme disease can occasionally transmit [other tick-borne diseases](#) as well.

Now let's fine-tune some of this information!

The bacterium is a microscopic cock-screw (a *spirochete*) that burrows into any tissue or organ that it chooses with the resulting variety of seemingly unrelated symptoms. That tell-tale "bull's-eye" rash unfortunately appears in only about half of those bitten by an infected tick. This is why it is so important to do that "**tick check**" each and every time you have outdoor activity. If a tick is attached for more than one day, your risk of contracting this disease becomes a near certainty!

There is a specific laboratory test; Western Blot, that can determine if you have a current infection or have had a past infection that will provide a definitive diagnosis. However, with Lyme disease now considered endemic or wide-spread in our area, health care providers generally begin treating with the required course of antibiotics whenever a person is known to have been bitten by a suspect tick.

As most of you know, my mantra in life is all about *prevention*. Lyme disease **is** preventable but requires **each individual** to do their own *prevention*. All I can personally do is to provide you with the knowledge of how to avoid being another statistic. Once bitten, Lyme can be with you for life!

Please use the prevention methods needed for this and all other vector-borne disease of the season. If it isn't the ticks, it'll be the pesky mosquitoes. I would love *not* to get all these disease reports for Merrimac residents. Help me out!! Go online and check out the CDC website and then PREVENT!

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