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Lyme disease is on the rise. Here's what you need to know

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Check for ticks, avoid the risks

Most people tend to think that tick season is confined to the warm months. In the summer, it's not uncommon to come inside and find a few ticks on your clothes or your skin, especially if you've just returned from a walk in the woods.

But in recent years, ticks have become a year-round concern for everyone, not just people who spend a lot of time outside.

“Because of the rising deer population and effects of global warming on the northeast U.S., tick season has expanded more into spring and fall than it had previously,” said Stanley Martin, MD, director of infectious diseases at Geisinger. “With the longer tick season comes the risk of [Lyme disease](#).”

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection transmitted by blacklegged tick bites. Ticks pick up the bacteria from mice and spread it to humans. Generally, if a tick has been attached to your skin for 36 hours or more, it can transfer the disease.

In most cases, the easiest way to identify Lyme disease is with its signature “bullseye” rash, which is a red, circular rash that looks like a bullseye. The rash shows up at the site of the tick bite.

“Lyme disease can cause headache, fatigue and flu-like symptoms,” said Dr. Martin. “If you have a tick on your skin, remove it with tweezers. Close the tweezers as close to your skin as possible to grab the tick’s head and avoid squeezing its body. Remove it with a steady pull and extract any parts of the head that remain attached.”

If you believe it has been attached for more than 36 hours or if you are showing signs of Lyme disease, see your doctor. In most cases, they can remove the tick and prescribe antibiotics to cure the infection.

How to avoid Lyme disease

The best way to avoid Lyme disease is to stay away from areas where ticks hang out. Ticks tend to hide out in tall grasses and forested areas. Quite often, they’ll wait on the end of a blade of grass or a tree until someone walks by. Then, they grab on and try to attach themselves. Since there is no longer a specific tick season, it’s important to check every time you come back from hiking or being near forested areas, regardless of whether it’s spring, summer or fall.

“If you do go out in an area where there may be ticks, wear long clothing to cover any bare skin and use repellent that contains 20 percent or more DEET or picaridin” said Dr. Martin. “Once you get home, take time to check your whole body—no matter the season. If you find any ticks, remove them with tweezers and flush them down the toilet. If they have been attached for more than 36 hours, go to the doctor and bring the tick with you.”

If you’re feeling fatigued, nauseous, have aches or a bullseye rash, get to the doctor as soon as possible for treatment.

[Dr. Stanley Martin](#) is director of infectious diseases at Geisinger. To schedule an appointment with an infectious diseases specialist, call 570-271-6408.

