

# Protect yourself against tick bites

People are being reminded to protect themselves against the risk of tick bites. Ticks can carry Lyme disease which may be transmitted to humans through their bite. There are no vaccines to defend against tick-borne disease in the UK and Ireland. Therefore, the best defence is to avoid being bitten.

## **Signs and symptoms of Lyme disease**

Ticks are tiny spider-like creatures, which feed on the blood of animals and sometimes people.

If you are involved in outdoor activities which take you into the countryside, parks, or gardens with wildlife such as squirrels and hedgehogs, you may be at risk of tick bites.

[Lyme disease](#) is a bacterial infection which is transmitted by tick bites.

The earliest and most common symptom of Lyme disease is a pink or red circular rash that develops around the area of the bite, three to 30 days after someone is bitten.

The rash is often described as looking like a bullseye on a dartboard.

You may also experience flu-like symptoms, such as:

- tiredness
- headaches
- muscle or joint pain

Consult [your GP](#) if a rash or other symptoms develop within a few weeks of a tick bite, as early treatment can prevent progression to chronic disease.

If Lyme disease is left untreated, further health issues may develop months or even years later, including:

- problems affecting the nervous system
- heart problems
- inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord

## **Preventing tick bites**

Late spring, early summer and autumn are peak times for tick bites, which coincide with people venturing outdoors in the warmer weather.

It's important to take preventive measures against tick bites and also look out for ticks after visiting affected areas.

The best way of preventing Lyme disease is to avoid being bitten when you are

in grassy or woodland areas known to have a high tick population. The following precautions might help to prevent Lyme disease:

- keep to footpaths and avoid long grass when out walking
- wear a long-sleeved shirt
- tuck your trousers into your socks
- wear light-coloured clothes (to help you spot a tick on them)
- use insect repellent
- check yourself for ticks and remove any promptly
- check your children and pets for ticks

There is currently no vaccine available to prevent Lyme disease.

## **How to remove a tick**

If you find a tick on your or your child's skin, remove it using a pair of tweezers that won't squash the tick (such as fine-tipped tweezers) or a tick removal tool (available from pet shops or vets).

Gently grip the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull steadily away from the skin without crushing the tick. If you use a tick removal tool, follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Wash your skin with water and soap afterwards, then apply an antiseptic cream to the skin around the bite.

Don't use a lit cigarette end, a match head or substances such as alcohol or petroleum jelly to force the tick out.

## **More useful links**