Big Bite from a Tiny Tick: Lyme Disease Safety Tips

Lyme disease has been on the rise with almost 10,000 cases in humans reported to the Centers for Disease Control in 1992 compared to a few hundred reported cases in 1982 (a ten year spread). In 1998, however, close to 17,000 cases were reported. That's 7,000 more cases reported than the previous ten year spread in only six years.

You are at an increased risk of contracting Lyme Disease if you spend time in grassy, brushy, or woody areas where ticks, especially deer ticks, are known to inhabit. The deer tick, more so than the other two bacterium carrying beasts, are spreaders of the disease, and you can only catch Lyme disease when one of these little buggers bites and attaches itself to you. The nickname deer tick' comes from the fact that although the buggers feed on birds, skunks, dogs, cats, and sometimes, people, the adult tick prefers deer.

If you do happen to frequent grassy, brushy, and woody areas, your risks of coming in contact with a bacterium carrying tick are greater if your adventures take place in a Northeast, North central or Pacific Coastal area of the United States. About 90 percent of human Lyme Disease incidences have been reported from states.

The Lyme bugger must remain attached to your body for approximately 24 hours in order for its ineffective bacterium, Borrelia burgdorferi, to kick in. And although a very, very unfortunate individual could have the misfortune of acquiring the disease more than one time, the fact is every deer tick does NOT carry the disease causing bacterium.

If you should be one of the unfortunates who get bitten, you may notice a rash (erythema migrans) within 3 to 32 days. The

rash will be small, red, and round at first. In time, it may grow to more than two inches across. You may also have a headache, a fever, stiff neck, pain in your joints, and swollen lymph nodes. Immediate treatment will be imperative as your joints, nervous system, or heart could be impacted weeks or even years down the road.

To avoid risks of the disease:

Stay away from the grassy, brushy, and woody areas if you can. However, if you choose to frequent potentially infected areas, wear light colored clothing that covers your whole body. The light colored clothes will help you spot the little buggers if they get on you. Tuck your shirt in. Tuck your pants into your socks. Wear shoes that cover your entire foot. No sandals.

Use a tick repellent. Be sure to follow its labeled instructions.

After your outing, check yourself, your pets, and your friends/family members clothing, fur, hair, and shoes. Brush away ticks if you see any.

If a tick gets on you or your pet, jerk the tick from its underside to remove it. It’s a good idea to use tweezers or gloves if you have them. However, matches, lit cigarettes, petroleum jelly, and alcohol are not recommended. Clean the bite and wash your hands.