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All You Wanted to Know About Ticks and Lyme Disease Part I

The summer had just arrived and many parents have already called me to report suspicious rashes that their kids developed and the possibility that they are infected with “Lyme Disease”.

Lyme Disease is one of the fastest growing *Infectious Diseases* in the U.S. The State of New York, being in the Northeastern U.S., is an endemic area for Lyme Disease. The reason this disease is so important is because if left undetected, it can spread to two major organs; namely the Heart and the Brain where it could leave irreversible damage.

Let’s go over the basic facts about this important disease. First, this disease has a very interesting cycle in nature. The most common bacteria that is the main culprit of the disease type in the U.S. is called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. These bacteria are commonly found in dead rodents and subsequently carried over via Deer ticks to infect humans. It turns out that these ticks multiply best on the skin of certain type of Deer (hence their given the name “Deer Ticks”).

How can you or your child contract Lyme Disease? - Deer Ticks can be found on any open field, especially in tall grass areas. Camping, Hiking or even simply laying down on the grass for a few minutes can expose us to these dangerous Ticks.

Locating the Tick

After enjoying your outdoor activities, thoroughly check yourself and your kids for any ticks. Deer Ticks are usually very small, about the size of a sesame seed!!! Please check carefully in areas where the skin is exposed: The Scalp (especially behind the ears), Neck, Hands and Feet.

Here I would like to break some good news to my dear readers:

1. Large ticks are usually Dog Ticks that *do not* contain the harmful bacteria.
2. It takes about *24 hrs* for the Deer Tick to transfer their Bacteria to humans. Therefore if you find small, sesame sized ticks on your child *right after* a trip, your child may not have been *infected* yet.
3. Midsize Ticks – these can be Ticks that rested on your child a little too long (they grow larger because they actually feed on our blood and grow). I would suggest saving these ticks after removal and showing them to your physician.

Removing the tick:

This step is very important. I have had many parents bring me “parts and pieces” of ticks, or accidently left a piece of the tick’s mouth or head stuck in their child’s skin.



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Try and follow this advice:

- Generally, the recommended method is simply to pull the tick out with fine tweezers as close to the skin as possible, without twisting, and avoiding crushing the body of the tick or removing the head from the body.
- Avoid twisting or jerking the tick, this could cause the head of the tick to separate from the body, leaving the head stuck in the skin.
- If you must use your fingers for this operation, cover them with a clean tissue during this procedure and wash them after the tick has been removed.
- Wash the bite with antibacterial soap and place the tick in a sealed plastic container marked with the date, in case the tick is later needed for confirmation of the illness.
- Resist using other methods to free the Tick from the body (i.e. applying a soapy cotton ball, petroleum jelly, nail polish or a hot match on the tick). These methods may actually stimulate the tick to quickly inject the harmful bacteria into the body.

In the Next IssueThe Signs, Symptoms and available Treatment Options of Lyme Disease – so stay Tuned!!!

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