



May 2015  
Revised June 2018

## Lyme Disease

This leaflet seeks to raise awareness of the Hazards of Ticks in forests and woodlands, and the best methods to prevent Lyme disease infection from a Tick bite.

### 1. What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that is carried by deer and sheep ticks in many parts of the UK, especially in parts of the Highlands of Scotland, and in the New Forest in Hampshire. It is potentially serious for someone who has been bitten and infected and does not receive prompt medical attention. Infection occurs when an infected tick bites a human and transfers the bacteria into the blood stream. It is generally accepted that the risk of contracting the bacteria is very low if a tick is removed promptly using a correct technique with “tick twisters” – proprietary tick removal tools which can be purchased from the Internet and many outdoor stores.

Whilst the rate of infection within the tick population in the UK is still low, it is increasing, and incidents of Lyme disease have increased, particularly in land based workers, e.g. shepherds, stalkers, forestry workers, ecologists.

Lyme disease confirmed in an employee from an infection acquired at work is a reportable disease under the RIDDOR Regulations. The employer has a duty to report such occurrences.

### 2. Where do ticks live and how do they attach to humans?

Ticks inhabit forest and woodland and open hill areas, and are located on vegetation such as heather, grasses and scrub. When people pass by and brush against the vegetation the ticks drop onto clothing and skin and then move around on humans to find a place to bite and “attach”.

### 3. How is it best to reduce or avoid the risk of infection?

Prevention is the best method of avoiding Lyme disease.

Prevention is best achieved by covering up when entering tick infested areas, wearing long trousers, long sleeves, and gaiters. If gaiters are not available trousers can be tucked inside socks. Lush and overgrown vegetation should be avoided in areas where there are known tick infestations.

Some proprietary insect repellents can help deter insects from exposed skin. Users should read the labels carefully before applying.

Upon leaving an infected area people should check themselves very carefully for ticks on clothing and skin. Wearing light coloured trousers/tops will make the ticks more visible when searching for them prior to removing them. Particular attention should be paid to armpits and groin areas and any parts of the body that are hard to see, e.g. behind knees.



#### **4. How should an attached tick be removed?**

Ticks which are attached should be removed using a proprietary tick-twister tool. These are available on the internet and from many outdoor shops. They enable the tick to be safely removed without causing the tick to inject more bacteria/fluid. No other methods of removal or killing the tick are recommended.

#### **5. What if I think I may have Lyme disease?**

Some people who have been bitten develop a reaction at the bite site and a characteristic red rash and swelling. Not all people develop the rash. Other early symptoms can include fever, joint pain, swelling of limbs and fatigue. Anyone who suspects that they have developed a reaction to a tick bite should visit a GP without delay and mention ticks and Lyme disease and their occupation. Sometimes you can have blood tests taken and they come back negative. However, if you are still experiencing symptoms go back to your GP. Sometimes Lyme disease doesn't always show up. A recent reported incident with a forestry worker who over a two year period suffered with symptoms of Lyme disease; the tests kept coming back negative. However, after two years his test came back positive for Lyme disease.

The GP will arrange for suitable antibiotic treatment and if necessary will write to the employer to confirm any Lyme disease diagnosis. There are blood screening tests available but some GPs will now treat immediately on symptoms/occupation.

#### **6. Are there other sources of information?**

There are a wealth of leaflets and websites about Lyme disease, see links below

- **Lyme Disease Action** – [www.Lymediseaseaction.org.uk](http://www.Lymediseaseaction.org.uk)  
Website with information leaflets free to download and links to other resources.
- **Public Health England website** - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/lyme-disease-guidance-data-and-analysis> Leaflets and resources on the disease, prevention, advice for GPs
- **British Mountaineering Council Leaflet** - <http://www.thebmc.co.uk/Download.aspx?id=297>