Lyme Disease

by

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Lyme disease usually is first noticed as a characteristic red circular skin lesion. It may develop multiple secondary lesions, blotches, cheek rash, skin rash, conjunctivitis and swelling around the eye. It may be accompanied by malaise and fatigue, fever, chills, headache, and can affect lymph nodes. Other possible intermittent and changing symptoms occurring over several weeks include: irritation to brain and spinal cord membranes, degenerative brain disease, spleen enlargement, sore throat, cough, testicular swelling, and facial palsy.

Migratory polyarthritis affecting tendons, bones, and muscles may occur. There are numerous neurological and cardiac abnormalities, some of which occur weeks to months after initial manifestations. Arthritis, the most common manifestation, may occur weeks to years later and last longer. Occasionally, erosion of cartilage and bone occurs.

Lyme disease is caused by a spirochete. (Syphilis is another well known disease caused by a spirochete.) The lyme spirochete was first identified only in 1982, genus *Borrelia*. It can be found in skin, blood, and cerebrospinal fluid of those infected.

Originally observed at Old Lyme, Connecticut in 1975, the disease seemed to occur initially in the Northeast, Midwest, and Pacific Coast states, but cases have now appeared across the entire nation. Known tick vectors include *Ixodes dammini, I. pacificus*, and many more, through transstadial transmission. Deer and rodents apparently help maintain the disease cycle. The spirochete had been found in other tick species in Europe and Australia. Onset of the illness is most prevalent between May and November, especially June and July. The incubation period is 3-32 days.

Treatment is by antibiotic therapy for 10-20 days. The drug of choice is tetracycline for those greater or equal nine years of age and for early treatment. Penicillin and erythromycin can also be used. Late stage treatment may require high-dose intravenous penicillin.

There is no evidence of person to person transmission. The age range of recorded cases is 2-88 years. Reinfection can occur.