Lyme disease in children
Information for parents

Introduction
This leaflet aims to help you understand the causes and treatment of Lyme disease and how to prevent your child from future tick bites. Please ask a member of staff if you have any questions.

What is Lyme disease?
Lyme disease, also known as Lyme borreliosis, is an infectious disease which is spread to humans by infected blacklegged ticks. Ticks are tiny insects found in woodland areas that feed on the blood of the human they bite. Tick bites often go unnoticed and the tick can remain feeding for several days before being noticed or dropping off. However, the longer the tick is in place, the higher the risk of it passing on the infection.

Although anyone can get Lyme disease, children that spend a lot of time outdoors are at particular risk, especially in regions where the disease is commonly found. Areas with the highest rates of Lyme disease are New Forest, Salisbury Plain, Exmoor, the South Downs, parts of Wiltshire and Berkshire and the Thetford Forest (Norfolk). Lyme disease has also been acquired abroad in numerous countries including the US, western and central Europe and Scandinavia. You can get the disease any time of year, except during winter.

Please be assured that not every tick carries Lyme disease.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?
Typical symptoms include a flu-like illness (fever, headache and fatigue) and a ‘bulls eye’ skin rash. If left untreated, Lyme disease can also affect the joints, heart and nervous system (and can cause facial nerve palsy and meningitis).

The disease is diagnosed based on symptoms, physical findings and the possibility of exposure to infected ticks. Laboratory testing for Lyme disease is not usually needed (the tests are not 100 per cent reliable).

How is it treated?
If there is a tick bite but no symptoms, the doctor may not suggest antibiotic treatment but recommend close observation instead. If symptoms of Lyme disease develop, depending on your child’s age they may be given a two-week course of antibiotics. If the joints, heart or nervous system have been affected, additional treatment might be needed.

How can I help my child recover?
Make sure they complete the course of antibiotics as recommended. If for any reason you find this difficult, please seek medical advice.
If at the end of the course of antibiotics your child still has symptoms, seek medical advice from the hospital.

**How can I prevent another tick bite?**

People can get Lyme disease again if another infected tick bites them, so prevention is important. To help prevent future tick bites:

- apply insect repellent that contains 20-30 per cent DEET (follow the instructions on the packaging)
- make children bathe or shower as soon as possible after being outdoors
- look for ticks on the body – this will be easier if the children are wearing light coloured clothes. Do not forget ticks can hide under the armpits, behind the knees, in the hair and in the groin
- put clothes in the dryer on a high heat for 60 minutes to kill any remaining ticks

**How to remove ticks**

Early removal of the tick can reduce the risk of infection.

Use tweezers to remove attached ticks and avoid crushing the tick’s body. Do not use any products (including petroleum jelly, a hot match and nail polish).

Grasp the tick firmly and as close to the skin as possible. Then, with a steady motion, pull the tick’s body away from the skin. Do not worry if the tick’s mouth remains in the skin, but do seek medical attention. Clean the area with an antiseptic.

**Useful contact numbers**

- NHS 111  
- St Mary’s Hospital’s paediatric A&E 020 3312 3772
- Grand union ward (infectious diseases) 020 3312 6465
- Great western ward (general paediatrics) 020 3312 6367
- Paediatric short stay unit 020 3312 6464

**How do I make a comment about my visit?**

Please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on 020 3312 7777 or email pals@imperial.nhs.uk. Alternatively, you may wish to express your concerns in writing to: Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary’s Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY.

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print, as a sound recording, in Braille, or in alternative languages. Please contact the communications team on 020 3312 5592.

We have a free and premium wi-fi service at each of our five hospitals. For further information please visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk