

3. Symptoms, Diagnosis and Treatment

Symptoms

Symptoms of Lyme disease vary and may develop days or weeks after a person is infected from a tick bite. Early symptoms may include:

- Fever, chills, headache, muscle and joint pain, fatigue or swollen lymph nodes.
- A rash at the site of the tick bite develops in 70 to 80 per cent of people infected.
- A distinctive expanding, red 'bull's-eye' rash may develop at the site of the bite in some people.
- Later symptoms may include dizziness, abnormal heartbeat, mental confusion or inability to think clearly (brain fog), nervous system disorders (involving the brain, nerves and spinal cord).

Diagnosis

Getting a diagnosis of Lyme disease can be difficult as your symptoms may be similar to other illnesses. Inform your health care provider of any travel outside of the province and whether you have developed a rash around a recent tick bite.

Prevention and early diagnosis of Lyme disease are important. Consult a health care provider as soon as possible if you think you may have Lyme disease. The earlier you receive a diagnosis and treatment, the better your chances to make a full recovery.

Your health care provider should:

- review your symptoms;
- find out if you were in an area at risk of having Lyme-infected blacklegged ticks;
- do a physical examination; and
- order laboratory blood tests to see if you have certain antibodies that could indicate you have the disease.

The Saskatchewan Disease Control Laboratory (SDCL) follows testing guidelines set out by the Canadian Public Health Laboratory Network. The testing involves a two-step process that includes an initial screening blood test followed by confirmatory testing at the National Microbiology Laboratory (NML) in Winnipeg. This is considered to be the best diagnostic testing for Lyme disease, and needs to be used in conjunction with clinical information about the patient.

Positive test results from laboratories in the United States or Europe that do not use methods validated by organizations such as the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the International Organization for Standardization, should in general be confirmed through repeat testing through the SDCL. This ensures that Canadians are all diagnosed by laboratory tests according to recognized international standards.

Treatment

Treatment is most successful in the early stages of the disease and involves a course of antibiotics for two to three weeks. Some people may experience symptoms that last months to years after treatment with a condition known as post-treatment Lyme disease syndrome (PTLDS). Symptoms can include:

- sleep disturbance;
- fatigue (tiredness);
- muscle and joint pain; or
- mental confusion or inability to think clearly.

Information on Lyme disease is also available on [HealthLine Online](#) by typing Lyme Disease in the health topic search.