

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

BABESIOSIS

Babesiosis is a treatable illness caused by microscopic parasites called Babesia. Certain types of ticks carry the parasite and can infect humans with a single bite. In humans, the parasites live inside red blood cells.

Symptoms

Symptoms may appear between one week and several months after a tick bite, and include:

- Flu-like symptoms, such as fever, chills, sweats, headache, and body aches, nausea, or fatigue.
- Many people who are infected feel fine and do not have any symptoms.
- Because the parasites destroy red blood cells, babesiosis can cause a low blood count (anemia).

Transmission

- Babesiosis mainly spreads through tick bites, specifically the bites of blacklegged ticks or deer ticks.
- Babesia parasites cannot spread from one person to another. However, they could be transmitted through a blood transfusion from an infected donor or from a pregnant woman to her baby.
- Ticks carrying babesiosis are most often found in New England, New York, and New Jersey, as well as Wisconsin and Minnesota. However, they sometimes live in other areas, including the West Coast. Babesiosis is usually more common in summer when people spend more time outdoors.
- Infected people might not recall a tick bite because immature ticks are tiny (the size of a poppy seed).

Treatment

- Babesiosis is diagnosed by examining blood under a microscope and seeing Babesia parasites inside red blood cells. Your provider may need to send the sample to a specialized lab.
- Effective treatments are available, and most people respond well. People who do not have symptoms or signs of babesiosis usually do not need to be treated.
- Babesiosis can be severe, particularly in elderly people or those who have a weak immune system (such as from cancer, organ transplant, or AIDS) or other serious health conditions.

Prevention

- Most people will be exposed to tick-infested environments (woods, brushy areas, fields with high grass) at some point. Therefore, prevention measures should be aimed at personal protection:
 - Tuck your pant legs into your socks so that ticks cannot crawl up the inside of your pant legs.
 - Apply insect repellent containing permethrin or DEET according to the product's directions.
 - Conduct "tick checks" on yourself and children every hour or two. Use a mirror to search all parts of your body. Remove any tick you find on your body. Check pets as well before allowing them indoors.
- Keep yard and play areas well mowed to discourage ticks.
- Ticks usually must stay attached to a person for more than 24-36 hours to transmit the parasite.

Additional Information

To remove an attached tick, grasp it with tweezers (NOT bare hands) as close as possible to the skin and pull with firm, steady pressure straight out. Do not twist or jerk the tick, as the mouthparts may break off. If tweezers are not available, protect fingers with rubber gloves or tissue paper. After removing the tick, disinfect the bite area and wash your hands. Contact your local health department for tick identification and testing.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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