

Babesiosis

What is babesiosis?

Babesiosis is a rare, severe, and sometimes fatal tick-borne disease caused by various types of *Babesia*, a microscopic parasite that infects red blood cells. Babesiosis is now officially reportable in New Hampshire, and the number of cases reported every year is increasing. Babesiosis is not transmitted from person to person. It is also possible to get babesiosis from a blood transfusion, but this is much less common.

Who gets babesiosis?

Babesiosis is most common in the elderly or in people whose immune systems are compromised, such as transplant recipients and people receiving certain types of cancer treatment. Cases of the disease have been primarily reported during spring, summer, and fall in the northeastern United States.

How is babesiosis spread?

Babesiosis is transmitted by the bite of an infected deer tick, *Ixodes scapularis*, which also carries Lyme disease. The tick is carried by voles, deer, and mice. Transmission can also occur from transfusion of contaminated blood.

What are the symptoms of babesiosis?

Symptoms of babesiosis can include fever, extreme fatigue, dehydration, mental confusion, and anemia and can last from several days to several months. It is also possible to have babesiosis and have no symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear after being exposed to babesiosis?

It can take from 5 to 33 days for babesiosis symptoms to appear once a person is infected with the parasite, but less time in immunocompromised individuals.

How is babesiosis diagnosed?

A laboratory test can identify the parasite in red blood cells.

What is the treatment for babesiosis?

There are anti-parasite medications that can be effective against babesiosis as well as antibiotics. Many people do not become sick enough to require treatment. It is also possible to become infected with babesiosis and Lyme disease at the same time, so be sure to seek medical attention if you become ill after a tick bite.

Does past infection with babesiosis make a person immune?

It is not known whether past infection with babesiosis makes a person immune.

What can people do to prevent getting babesiosis?

When in tick-prone habitat—wooded and grassy areas—take special precautions to prevent tick bites, such as wearing light-colored clothing which makes ticks easier to see, tuck pants into socks and shirt into pants. Check during every two or three hours of outdoor activity for ticks on clothing or skin. Brush off any ticks on clothing before skin attachment occurs. A thorough check of skin

surfaces for attached ticks should be done at the end of the day. If removal of attached ticks occurs within 24 hours, the risk of tick-borne infection is limited.

Insect repellents can be effective at reducing bites from ticks that can transmit disease. Always follow manufacturer's directions. Repellents commonly available to consumers with the active ingredient DEET, picaridin (also known as KBR 3023), oil of lemon eucalyptus, or permethrin for clothing have been proven effective.

What should I do if I think I was exposed to babesiosis?

Contact your healthcare provider as soon as possible.

What is the best way to remove a tick from skin?

Grasp the mouthparts with a tweezers as close as possible to the attachment (skin) site. Be careful not to squeeze, crush, or puncture the body of the tick, which may contain infectious fluids. After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite site and wash your hands. See or call a healthcare provider if there are any concerns about incomplete tick removal. Do not attempt to remove the tick by using petroleum jelly, lit cigarettes, or other home remedies because these may actually increase the chance of contracting a tick-borne disease.

For more information about babesiosis, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services at 603-271-4496 or 1-800-852-3345 x4496 or visit our website at www.dhhs.state.nh.us. Or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov.