

Lyme Disease

What are the signs of Lyme Disease?

Clinical disease is similar to that described in people in that the signs can be vague and chronic. The variety of signs that have been attributed to Lyme Disease (lameness, joint swelling, kidney disease, ocular inflammation and incoordination) can also be caused by other organisms or problems.

How is Lyme disease spread?

Lyme disease is NOT spread from horse to horse. It is caused by a bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which is spread by deer ticks through bites. Signs may occur months after exposure.

What puts horses at risk for Lyme disease?

Tick bites. Proximity to woods or wild areas that harbor deer.

Is Lyme disease around here?

The eastern part of New York State, and New England, are well known “hotbeds” for Lyme disease. The disease is less common in the western part of the state, but it is still diagnosed in some horses in our area. Lyme disease is less common than anaplasmosis.

How is Lyme disease diagnosed?

There is a specific blood test –the Lyme Multiplex test--that can be sent to Cornell to assess whether a horse has been exposed to the organism. However, judging whether the horse truly has Lyme disease or not is not simple. The test assesses antibodies that the horse has made. It can indicate whether exposure was recent or occurred months before testing, and if the horse may have received a vaccine in the past. Deciding whether or not a horse’s symptoms are caused by the bacterium remains somewhat subjective. It is usually advised that other diagnostic testing be performed to rule out more common causes of the symptoms that have been associated with the disease.

How is Lyme disease treated?

Once a horse has been determined to truly be sick with Lyme disease, it is given antibiotics for several weeks.

Is there a vaccine?

There is a vaccine that has been approved for use in dogs, but safety and efficacy has not been assessed in horses. Some veterinarians in areas with high risk of Lyme disease have administered the vaccine to their equine patients. There is preliminary evidence that the vaccine may induce some protection in horses. This is under further study.

Can I get Lyme disease from my horse?

No. However, deer ticks can transmit this bacterium to humans, and dogs. Signs of reported illness are similar.

What can I do to reduce the risk of Lyme disease?

It is hard to eliminate the risk of tick bites, but pasture mowing may help. Some owners spray products like Frontline designed for tick control on dogs on their horse's legs and chest once a month.