

## TICK TALES

There are ticks in China Camp State Park. They tend to be most active in winter, but they are present year-round. A recent study shows that approximately 3% are infected with *Borrelia bergdorferi*, the organism that causes Lyme disease. Over the years, studies have shown infection levels to be as high as 20% in some areas.

Ticks climb up on grass and brush, attaching to animals (including people) as they brush past. To avoid the ticks, stay on the trails (it's also a park regulation). It's best to wear light-colored clothing with long sleeves and long pants. Insect repellents are effective in keeping the critters off skin and clothing. When you get home after a hike, tumble-drying clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes will kill ticks, and a shower will wash off any loose ticks, and expose any that are already attached. These can be removed from skin by using tweezers to grasp the head of the tick as close to the skin as possible, then pulling straight out. REI and others sell tick "scrapers" that also work well.

If you remove a tick, the first step is to figure out how long it has been attached to you. If you know it's been less than 24 to 36 hours, you're done. Even if the tick is infected with Lyme, it won't transmit it to you in less than 24 to 36 hours.

If you think it's been there longer than 24 to 36 hours, the next step is to get it identified. Only one species of tick in California, *Ixodes pacificus*, carries *B. bergdorferi*. You can take a photo and submit it to [http://www.tickencounter.org/tick\\_identification](http://www.tickencounter.org/tick_identification).

If it's not *Ixodes pacificus*, you're done.

If it is *I. pacificus*, you can get the tick tested for Lyme disease by the Marin Sonoma Mosquito Abatement District.

<http://www.co.marin.ca.us/hs/lab.cfm>.

At this point, it gets a little tricky, because some Lyme experts feel that testing the tick is not helpful in making a decision about treatment. It's probably best to check with your health care provider at that point.

Guidelines for prophylactic treatment for possible exposure have changed over the years. It used to be that no treatment was advised until a definite diagnosis has been made. However, more recently some experts are recommending a single dose of an antibiotic if exposure is suspected in a high-risk area (generally not California).

<https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/tickbornediseases/tick-bites-prevention.html>

This is somewhat controversial, so people you talk to may be getting conflicting advice. There's no question that Lyme disease is overdiagnosed and overtreated in the US, but it can be hard to diagnose, and it's a bad disease to have to live with, hence the controversy.

If you develop a "target" rash (a ring around the bite, not just a local red raised area) a few days after the bite, that's a strong indicator of Lyme infection, and you should be seen by a health care provider.