



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Babesiosis

What is babesiosis?

Babesiosis is a disease caused by a parasite which infects red blood cells. It is transmitted by ticks and occurs in the northeast and upper Midwest states.

How is babesiosis spread?

The parasites are not passed from person-to-person directly. You can get babesiosis from:

- Being bitten by a tick (black-legged or deer ticks);
- Having a blood transfusion from a donor with a 'silent' infection; or
- Sometimes from an infected mother to her unborn child.

Who is at risk for babesiosis?

People who spend time outdoors in tick-infested areas, especially during warmer months, are at an increased risk of becoming infected.

What are the symptoms of babesiosis?

Most people who have babesiosis will feel fine and show no symptoms. Some people may develop flu-like symptoms, including:

- Fever
- Chills
- Sweats
- Headache
- Body aches
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Some people may have a type of anemia that can lead to jaundice and dark-colored urine.

Rarely, babesiosis can be a severe disease.

People who are most at risk for a severe disease are those who:

- do not have a spleen or whose spleen does not have normal function;
- have a weak immune system (such as people with cancer or AIDS);
- have other major health problems (such as liver or kidney disease); or
- are elderly.

How do I know if I have babesiosis?

See a doctor if you have the signs of babesiosis and have been in tick areas or have had a recent blood transfusion. Your doctor may review your signs, give you an exam, and order lab tests.

How is babesiosis treated?

A doctor can prescribe medicine that will treat the disease.

How is babesiosis prevented?

Preventing the ticks from biting you will prevent babesiosis. Ticks are most active in warmer months. To prevent tick bites:

- Walk on cleared trails and stay in the center of the trail;
- Avoid contact with leaf litter, brush, and overgrown grass;
- Wear light colored long pants with cuffs tucked into socks and long sleeves when walking in grassy or wooded areas. (It is easier to spot ticks on light colored clothing);
- Put insect repellent with DEET, picaridin, IR3535, or oil of lemon eucalyptus on clothes, socks, shoes and exposed skin;
- Permethrin (Permanone) can be used on clothes and shoes, but should not be applied to skin;
- Check every 2 hours for ticks on clothes or exposed skin; and
- After you return from the grassy or wooded area, brush off your clothing and body. Inspect your clothes and body for ticks, particularly in the areas of the groin, back of the neck and knees, and armpits.
- Take a hot shower and wash clothes in hot water.
- Check your hiking gear and pets for ticks as well.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/babesiosis/>

This page was last reviewed May 2015.