

## Lyme Disease- The Silent Killer An Equestrian Magazine Article

**Of all the ailments that your horse can have, Lyme disease is one of the most puzzling. Since horses are athletic in nature, many of the early symptoms of the disease can often be explained away as normal equestrian ailments. In fact, almost 90% of the horses that contract Lyme disease go undiagnosed. Understanding more about the factors that play a role in Lyme disease, and understanding how to diagnose and treat the disease can go a long way to protecting your livestock. Keep reading to find out more about this silent killer.**

What is Lyme Disease?

Lyme disease is transmitted much like West Nile. A deer tick feeds on an infected rodent and then passes on the disease to its next meal. Lyme disease is actually a type of bacteria (*Borrelia Burgdorferi*) that can live within the tick for several years. Lyme disease can manifest in a variety of animals, including humans. Once infected, the bacterium begins to attack several different systems within the body. Primarily the joints, musculoskeletal system, and neurological systems. What makes the disease even more puzzling is the fact that some animals will never actually develop Lyme disease. They may show signs of an infection, while others may remain 100% healthy.

### Symptoms

Once a horse is infected, they may show a variety of different symptoms. The most common ones include:

- Overall change in temperament, you may not be able to put your finger on the exact cause, but the horse appears different
- Lameness- usually of larger joints and may shift as the disease progresses.
- Generalized stiffness
- Laminitis (inflammation of hoof wall)
- Unwillingness to work – which usually means that they are in pain
- Irritability

If you suspect Lyme disease, it is important to discuss your concerns with your veterinarian. They will take into account the region that you live in, and will likely perform a series of blood tests and examine the horse to confirm your suspicions.

### Treating Lyme disease

If Lyme disease is the culprit, your veterinarian will administer a course of antibiotics to treat the bacterial infection. They can choose oral, intramuscular or intravenous drugs depending on the horse and the severity of the infection. Typically, the horse will begin to show marked improvement within the first week of treatment, and will continue to improve in the weeks ahead. Some horses will show signs of worsening at the beginning of an antibiotic therapy, so it is important to monitor your horse closely for lameness during treatment.

### Can It Be Prevented?

At present, there is no vaccine for Lyme Disease. Your main defense is going to be through tick control. A tick has to be attached to its host for 12-24 hours before it can transmit the bacteria, so if you check your horses once or twice a day for any ticks, you should be able to decrease the chances of an infection. There are also several topical tick repellants that can be applied to further protect your livestock. Lastly, try to keep your pasture areas clear of brush, wood piles and other debris that would harbor ticks.

Lyme Disease is a very serious condition that affects thousands of animals each year. Luckily, with a little bit of grooming and know how, you can protect your livestock from this silent killer.