

What is STARI?

Persons in the southeastern and south-central states, including Oklahoma, have reported having an erythema migrans (EM) or “bull’s-eye” rash that is typically seen in persons with the early stages of Lyme disease. However, testing for the bacteria that causes Lyme disease (*Borrelia burgdorferi*) is negative. This “Lyme-like” disease has been named (STARI). The cause of this disease is not fully understood yet, but there is growing evidence that the causative agent is a related, but distinct *Borrelia* bacterium named *Borrelia lonestari* (*B. lonestari*).

How is STARI contracted?

Recent evidence suggests the *B. lonestari* bacteria are spread by the “lone star” tick, *Amblyomma americanum*. Lone star ticks are commonly found in Oklahoma, and are known to aggressively bite humans. Although these ticks are very common, studies have found that very few (1-3%) are infected with *B. lonestari* in nearby states.

What are the symptoms of STARI?

The symptoms of STARI are similar to the early symptoms of Lyme disease. A large bull’s-eye shaped rash and mild symptoms of fever, tiredness, and joint pains have been reported. Persons may or may not recall being bitten by a tick in the previous two to three weeks.

What is the testing and treatment for STARI?

There is no commercially available test for *B. lonestari*. Persons with a bull’s-eye rash should seek care from their physician. Your physician may prescribe antibiotics to treat STARI. You do not need to take antibiotics just because a tick bites you. The majority of tick bites will not result in STARI, or the other diseases transmitted by ticks.

How do I protect myself from STARI?

The best way to protect your self from STARI and other tickborne diseases is to prevent tick bites. Personal tick bite prevention precautions include:

- Wear light colored clothing to make ticks easier to see.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants tucked into socks to deprive ticks of attachment sites.
- Wear closed-toe shoes, not sandals.
- Hikers and bikers should stay in the center of trails to avoid grass and brush.
- Check for ticks AT LEAST once per day; particularly along waistbands, in the armpits, and groin area.
Don’t forget the back and the hair!
- Use a tick repellent with DEET on skin and clothing according to the directions.
- Use a tick repellent with permethrin ON CLOTHING ONLY as directed by the label.

How should an attached tick be removed?

Since the risk of contracting a tickborne illness is higher the longer the tick stays attached; ticks should be removed as quickly as possible. Use tweezers for tick removal, but if these are unavailable, cover your fingers with a tissue (or similar material) and grab the tick, as close to the surface of the skin as possible. Then, applying gentle steady traction, pull the tick straight back for removal. Sometimes a small red welt may be present on the skin where the tick was attached. This is generally due to localized irritation from the tick’s saliva and can be expected to resolve in one to two days.

