Maryland has one of the highest rates of Lyme disease in the U.S. There is no vaccine currently available to prevent Lyme disease, so prevention and early detection are key.

Lyme disease has increased dramatically in Maryland
Since 1993, Maryland’s cases of Lyme disease reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have increased by more than 650 percent!

Maryland has one of the highest rates of Lyme disease in the United States. But many health care professionals believe that the actual number of cases far exceeds the reported figures.

How Lyme disease is spread
Lyme disease, so named because the first case was reported in Lyme, Connecticut, is caused by bacteria transmitted by the bite of an infected black-legged tick, often carried by the white tailed deer. The tick must be attached to the skin for at least 24 hours for transmission to occur.

It’s important to note, however, that not every tick bite causes Lyme disease. There is no vaccine currently available to prevent Lyme disease, so early detection and treatment are important.

Recognize the symptoms of Lyme disease
From three to 30 days after a tick bite, a gradually expanding rash occurs at the site of the tick bite in 70-80% of people infected. The rash can expand over several days to up to 12 inches in diameter and may resemble a bull’s eye. But not everyone infected with Lyme will get this tell-tale rash.

Other symptoms may include fever, headache, and fatigue. If untreated, the disease may spread within a few days to weeks and may cause a loss of muscle tone on one or both sides of the face, severe headaches, and neck stiffness, shooting pains that may interrupt sleep, heart palpitations and dizziness, and pain that shifts from joint to joint.

After several months, 60 percent of untreated patients may develop severe joint pain and swelling, particularly in the knees.

Most cases of Lyme can be cured with antibiotics, especially when treatment is started early. Contact your health care provider if you develop any of these symptoms after a tick bite or after being in any area at risk for tick infestation.

Keep ticks off
You can reduce your risk of a tick bite by following these tips:

■ Wear light-colored long pants and long sleeves to help keep ticks off your skin and locate them if they do crawl onto you.

■ Tuck your pants into your socks, and tuck your shirt into your pants to keep ticks on the outside of clothing.

■ Insect repellent containing 20-50% DEET is recommended for use on adults to prevent tick bites. Repellents with up to 30% DEET can safely be used on children over 2 months of age.

■ Treat clothes with permethrin (but do not use permethrin directly on skin).

Try to avoid wooded or brushy areas with tall grass and leaf litter.

Check yourself, your children, and your pets daily for ticks after spending time in the outdoors.

To remove a tick
■ Use fine-tipped tweezers and protect your hands with a tissue or gloves.

■ Grab the tick close to the skin. Do not twist or jerk. Gently pull straight up until all parts of the tick are removed.

■ Wash the tick bite with soap and warm water or an antiseptic. Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based gel.

■ Do not use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish or any other product to remove ticks.

For more information on Lyme disease, go to: http://phpa.dhmh.maryland.gov/OIDEOR/CZVBD/SitePages/lyme-disease.aspx or http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/.