



The Western Black-legged Tick is known to transmit Lyme disease.

✓ Lyme disease still rare in Santa Cruz County

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WHILE SPIDER BITES and bee stings may be painful, the effects usually fade quickly. But the bite of the Western Black-legged tick can result in Lyme disease — a long-lasting illness that won't go away without treatment.

Fortunately, Lyme disease is still rare in the county, which recorded only five cases in 1991, and two in the first quarter of this year. Lowell Rau, who identifies ticks at the county environmental health department, says a lot of the ticks he sees are of the Western

Black-legged variety — the kind that carries Lyme disease — but only about 2 percent of them are infected.

The first symptom of Lyme disease, visible within a week or two after infection, is a bull's-eye shaped rash spreading out from the bite, said Barbara Fleming, a public health nurse at the county communicable diseases department. Later symptoms often resemble flu: headache, fatigue, chills, and less commonly sore throat and swollen glands. After many years, it may cause arthritis and forgetfulness. Caught in the first two weeks, Lyme disease is easily treated with antibiotics, Fleming

said. Later, the cure is more difficult.

Ticks spread the disease through their saliva, which they inject into a bite to prevent the blood from coagulating. Rau said experts believe a tick must be attached 12 to 24 hours to infect a person, but he recommends that a tick be checked if the bite lasts two hours. It's best to have a lab determine whether a tick carries Lyme disease, because many people never develop the circular rash, he said.

Fleming said the best way to avoid Lyme disease is to wear long sleeves and long pants, and check for ticks after a walk through the woods or fields.