



BABESIOSIS

What is babesiosis?

When microscopic parasites infect red blood cells, they can cause an infection called Babesiosis. Only a few species (types) of *Babesia* parasites have been found in people but many have been found in animals. The main species that has been found in people in the United States is *Babesia microti*, which usually infects white-footed mice and other small mammals. Most cases occur in the Northeast including parts of New England, New York, and New Jersey; Wisconsin and Minnesota. Occasionally, cases of *babesia microti* have been reported in Delaware.

Who gets babesiosis?

Anyone can get babesiosis but people more at risk are those who spend time in wooded or bushy areas.

How is babesiosis spread?

Babesia is spread by the bite from an infected blacklegged tick/deer tick in the young nymph stage. Individuals can also become infected when they receive a contaminated blood transfusion. Another way babesiosis spreads is from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy or delivery.

What are the symptoms of babesiosis?

Many people who are infected with *Babesia microti* feel fine and do not have any symptoms. Some people develop flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, sweats, headache, body aches, loss of appetite, nausea, or fatigue. Because *Babesia* parasites infect red blood cells, babesiosis can cause hemolytic anemia (from the destruction of red blood cells).

Babesiosis can be a severe, life-threatening disease, particularly in people who:

- do not have a spleen
- have a weak immune system for other reasons (such as cancer, lymphoma, or AIDS)
- have other serious health conditions (such as liver or kidney disease)
- are elderly.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms, if any, can start within a week or so. They usually develop within a few weeks or months, sometimes longer.



Frequently Asked Questions

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Exclusions are not necessary if a person has babesiosis.

What is the treatment for babesiosis?

Effective treatments are available. Individuals who do not have symptoms or signs of babesiosis usually do not need to be treated.

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of babesiosis?

People can take steps to prevent babesiosis and other tickborne infections. Prevention measures are particularly important for individuals at increased risk for severe babesiosis (for example, people who do not have a spleen). If possible, areas infested with ticks should be avoided, especially during warm months. If such areas cannot be avoided, use protective measures during outdoor activities.

The tiny *I. scapularis* ticks that spread *B. microti* usually must stay attached to a person for more than 36 to 48 hours to be able to transmit the parasite. Daily tick checks can prevent attachment and transmission of the parasite. Practicing **BLAST** can also help reduce the risk of getting babesia:

- B** - Bathe or shower within two hours of coming indoors.
- L** - Look for ticks on your body and remove them.
- A** - Apply repellent to your body and clothes.
- S** - Safeguard your yard.
- T** - Treat your pet.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/babesiosis/>