



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Babesiosis

What is babesiosis?

Babesiosis is a rare, serious, and sometimes fatal disease spread by the black-legged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*). This type of tick can carry *Babesia* parasites that attack the red blood cells of many animals, including man. The most commonly-identified parasites affecting man are *Babesia microti* and *Babesia divergens*.

Babesiosis occurs most often in the elderly or in people who already have a problem with their immune system. In the United States, most cases of this disease are reported in northeastern and midwestern states, during the spring, summer, or fall. Babesiosis is also reported in California, Washington, Wisconsin, and Georgia. It is known to occur worldwide, with many cases reported in Europe.

How do you get it?

You get the parasite from the bite of an infected tick. The black-legged tick is carried by a variety of mammals and birds. Babesiosis is not spread person-to person, except very rarely by blood transfusions from an infected person.

What are the symptoms of babesiosis?

The symptoms include fever, chills, joint pain, and fatigue. These symptoms can last

from several days to several months. Often, a person can be infected with the parasite but not show any symptoms.

When do symptoms start?

It usually takes 1 to 4 weeks, after infection, for symptoms to appear.

What is the treatment for babesiosis?

There is no specific treatment for babesiosis. However, some medications used in the treatment of malaria have also been useful in the treatment of babesiosis.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

No. Babesiosis is not transmitted person-to-person, except by blood transfusion.

If you get babesiosis once, can you get it again?

Whether or not past infection with babesiosis can protect a person from future infections is unknown.

How can you keep from getting it?

When outdoors in tick-infested areas, use tick repellents. It is also helpful to wear light colored clothing and to tuck the pant legs into socks.

Institute rodent-control measures in areas where people live.