

# Babesiosis • Provider Fact Sheet

Babesiosis is a preventable and treatable parasitic tickborne disease caused by intraerythrocytic *Babesia* parasites.



Nymphal tick (above) is approximately the size of a poppy seed.

## Where is babesiosis found in the United States?

- Babesiosis is mainly found in particular regions including:
  - The Northeast
  - The upper Midwest
- Babesiosis has been found less frequently in other regions, including the West Coast

## Who is at risk?

**Anyone.** People who engage in outdoor activities in areas where babesiosis is found are at higher risk for infection.

## How are *Babesia* parasites transmitted?

- By the bite of an infected tick (most common)
- Through a blood transfusion from an infected donor
- Congenitally

## What are the clinical manifestations?

- Infection can range from asymptomatic to severe.
- People who are asplenic, immunosuppressed, or elderly are at increased risk for life-threatening infection.
- Symptoms usually develop within 1 week to several months (or longer) after the exposure.
- Symptoms are nonspecific and may include fever, chills, body aches, or fatigue.
- Exam findings may include splenomegaly, hepatomegaly, or jaundice.
- Hemolytic anemia and thrombocytopenia are common.

## Diagnosing babesiosis

- Diagnosis is made by microscopic examination of blood smears for intraerythrocytic *Babesia* parasites.
- Antibody detection by serologic testing can provide supportive evidence for infection.

## Treatment of babesiosis

- Most asymptomatic persons do not require treatment
- For ill patients, babesiosis usually is treated for at least 7–10 days with:
  - atovaquone PLUS azithromycin; OR
  - clindamycin PLUS quinine (for severely ill patients)

## Prevention of tickborne babesiosis

Avoiding exposure to tick habitats is the best defense. Healthcare providers should advise patients who live in or visit areas inhabited by ticks to follow these recommendations:

- Walk on cleared trails; avoid areas with overgrown grasses or brush.
- Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks when outdoors. Tuck the pant legs into the socks.
- Apply repellents to skin and clothing. Follow the instructions on the product label.
- Shower soon after being outdoors.
- Check your entire body for ticks after being outdoors. For information about the best ways to remove a tick, visit [www.cdc.gov/ticks](http://www.cdc.gov/ticks).

## Prevention of transfusion-associated babesiosis

- No tests have been licensed yet for screening U.S. blood donors.
- If you have a patient who tests positive for *Babesia* infection, advise the patient to refrain from donating blood indefinitely.

For more information, please visit CDC's babesiosis website at [www.cdc.gov/parasites/babesiosis](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/babesiosis) and click "Resources for Health Professionals" or contact the Parasitic Diseases Branch at 404-718-4745, [parasites@cdc.gov](mailto:parasites@cdc.gov).



Center for Global Health  
Division of Parasitic Diseases and Malaria

