

Are military family members at risk for Lyme disease?

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It is often suggested that military service members are at an increased risk for contracting Lyme disease, given that they frequently work outdoors in tick-habitats, surrounded by tall grass, brush, weeds and leaf litter. But what about their family members? Are they “safer”?

A study by Schubert and Melanson, entitled “[Prevalence of Lyme Disease Attributable to Military Service at the USMA, West Point NY: FY2016–2018.](#)” looks at the exposure of military personnel and their families to the *Ixodes scapularis* (or black-legged) tick, the vector of Lyme disease. [1]

The authors examined cases of Lyme disease treated at a hospital on the West Point Military Reservation, in New York between 2016 and 2018. Out of 144 cases identified, 63 involved military personnel, but family members accounted for 81 cases.

The period prevalence of Lyme disease for military personnel was 292 encounters per 100,000 during a 3-year period. However, family members were at greater risk, with a period prevalence of 581 cases per 100,000.

These findings “show a difference in period prevalence between service members and family members,” writes Schubert, “with the family members being at higher risk to contract Lyme instead of service members, as is commonly suggested in the literature.”

The authors point out that further research is needed to determine if these findings were specific to West Point or are comparable across the military. Tick exposure, they write, may have been less at West Point than at other military locations.

“At West Point, the majority of active-duty military work indoor jobs during the academic months and spend limited time in a training ?eld environment,” Schubert points out.

Interestingly, however, “the data presented here suggest that proper personal protective measures (Permethrin treated uniforms and tick check training) have a significant effect on Lyme disease period prevalence,” since military personnel who were better protected and trained were less likely to contract Lyme disease.

The authors did not discuss the outcomes for the 63 Lyme disease cases.

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[Study explores the risk of tick bites among german military personnel](#)

[Military dependent child contracts Lyme disease abroad](#)

References:

1. Schubert, S. L. and V. R. Melanson (2019). "Prevalence of Lyme Disease Attributable to Military Service at the USMA, West Point NY: FY2016-2018." Mil Med.

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