Lyme Disease in the Lone Star State is believed to be rare but a study by an area scientist seems to be proving otherwise. Dr. Maria Esteve-Gassent is a Research Professor at Texas A & M University. She's been studying ticks and Lyme Disease for seven years. Now Dr. Esteve-Gassent and her students are collecting ticks from all over Texas. "We go personally out there and we hunt ticks," says Dr. Esteve-Gassent. They're testing the ticks for Lyme Disease. From Houston to Sugar Land to Austin and Dallas, to name a few, they have found ticks that have tested positive for Lyme Disease.

Dr. Esteve-Gassent says she tested about 300 of the itty bitty biting bugs so far. About a quarter of the ticks found here in Texas have Lyme. Although Lyme in the Lone Star State is said to be rare. "Most doctors will say there's no Lyme Disease in Texas. Hopefully this will change at some point," says Dr. Esteve-Gassent. She started the study months ago because she says there are so many questions about lyme in Texas and so few answers. One thing we do know, if you find a tick on your skin you're advised to carefully remove it with tweezers making sure to remove the mouth of the embedded bug from your skin and then see a doctor immediately. "The good thing about Lyme Disease it's curable if you catch it within the first week or so," she says.

You usually pick up ticks in wooded areas and they stay attached to your skin for several days. Dr. Esteve-Gassent suggests you spray Off bug repellent with Deet before going out. "It will repel ticks. So use it. Every time you go outdoors spray it on your kids, on yourself, on your clothes. Wear long sleeves and pants," says Dr. Esteve-Gassent and she says check your children and yourself when you go back indoors. "I would check behind the ears, nape of neck, under the arms, bend of the arms, bend of knees, back of thighs, waist area," she advises.

If Lyme is not caught early the disease can be debilitating with severe pain and even heart and brain problems. Dr. Gassent is also accepting ticks.

So if you find one in your yard and you would like it tested you can seal it in a container submerged in rubbing alcohol and mail it to her at Dr. Maria Esteve Gassent, Phd Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Sciences VMS 215 College Station, TX 77843-4467

Dr. Esteve-Gassent will present her findings at a microbiology conference in California this month. Also, once her study is complete the results will be featured in a medical journal.