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Western New York Public Health Alliance Press Release – Tickborne Illnesses

Protect Yourself Against Disease Carrying Ticks

The Western New York Public Health Alliance (WNYPHA) is urging residents and visitors to take precautions to avoid tickborne illnesses. Ticks can spread disease. Not all ticks can cause disease and not all bites will make you sick, but as these diseases become more common it's important to learn how to prevent a bite, how to remove a tick and what to do if you think you could have a tick-borne disease. "The warm winter and recent temperature increase have set the stage for a flourishing tick population, providing an update on Lyme disease, the most common tick related illness in our area, seems prudent," states Christine Schuyler, Public Health Director for Chautauque County and Co-Chair of the Western New York Public Health Alliance.

Lyme disease is also the most common disease spread by ticks in New York but there are other serious diseases they spread including Anaplasmosis, Ehrlichiosis, Babesiosis, and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.⁽¹⁾ There are many different species of ticks but locally the most common is the Deer Tick. The Deer Tick is a vector for several diseases (Lyme disease, Babesiosis, Anaplasmosis) and received the name because of its habit of living and feeding on white-tailed deer, however ticks acquire Lyme disease by feeding on infected mice and other small rodents.⁽²⁾

Ticks may be found in many types of settings such as woodlands, tree stumps, lawns and gardens, around stone walls, nature trails, outdoor summer camps, and playing fields. Ticks do not jump or fly, they attach to their host when a human or animal makes contact with something that a tick is on, like tall grass, shrubs, or an animal. The risk of human infection with Lyme is greatest in late spring and summer, but ticks can be active any time the temperature is above freezing.⁽³⁾ "The high concentration of ticks in NYS counties including Suffolk, Nassau, Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Orange, Ulster, Dutchess, and Albany leads me to believe the threat of tick-borne diseases will continue and likely increase locally in the future, this is why it is important to become aware and prepare now," said Pettit.



Lyme can only be transmitted after being bit by an infected tick-seeing an attached tick or a tick bite does not necessarily mean Lyme has been transmitted. It generally takes between three days to one month after a tick bite for Lyme disease symptoms to develop.⁽³⁾ In 60-80 percent of Lyme cases a "bulls-eye" circular rash or solid red patch develops at or near the site of the tick bite first and steadily gets larger or spreads out.⁽⁴⁾ You can also get several

patches of rash on your body. Early on in the disease (days to weeks post-tick bite) you may develop symptoms such as fever, chills, headaches, joint pain and/or swelling, fatigue, or facial paralysis (Bell's Palsy), sometimes these can be very mild.⁽⁵⁾ As Lyme disease progresses more severe symptoms like arthritis with severe joint pain and swelling may develop months-to-years post tick bite in 60% of persons who are not given antibiotic treatment.⁽⁵⁾ It is important to keep in mind that getting Lyme disease once does not provide protection against getting Lyme in the future, if you are bitten again at a different time you can get Lyme disease again. If you develop any of these symptoms you should call your doctor right away to inquire about getting tested and treated.

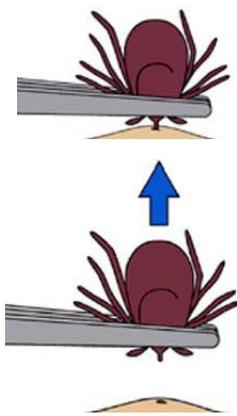
To prevent tick-borne illness exposure while outdoors you and your family can do the following:

- Wear light-colored clothing with a tight weave to spot ticks easily.
- Wear enclosed shoes, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. Tuck pant legs into socks or boots and shirt into pants.
- Check clothes and any exposed skin frequently while outdoors.
- Use insect repellent with 20-30% DEET.⁽⁴⁾
- Stay on cleared, well-traveled trails. Avoid dense woods and busy areas.
- Avoid sitting directly on the ground or on stone walls.
- Keep long hair tied back, especially when gardening.
- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after going indoors (preferably within two hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that may be on you.
- Do a final, full-body tick check at the end of the day (also check children and pets), and remove ticks promptly.

Additional prevention tips for homeowners to create a tick-free zone in your backyard to keep you, your family and pets safe from tick exposure:

- Keep grass mowed, along with clearing tall grasses and brush.
- Remove brush and leave around stonewalls and wood piles.
- Keep wood piles and bird feeders away from your home.
- Keep family dogs and cats out of wooded areas to reduce ticks brought into your home.
- Place swing sets, sand boxes, decks and patios in a sunny spot away from yard edges and trees.
- Place a 3-ft wide barrier of wood chips or gravel between lawns and wooded areas and around patios and play equipment.⁽³⁾

What you can do if you find a tick attached to you, a family member, or a pet:



You should use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the ticks by its mouth parts, as close to the surface of the skin as you can. Carefully pull the tick straight up without twisting. Do not touch the tick. Do not squeeze the body of the tick (may increase your risk of infection). Clean your hands and the areas on your skin where the tick was. Watch the site of the bite for rash (3-30 days after bite). Removing a tick within 36 hours of attachment to the skin can lower the risk of contracting Lyme disease.

To learn more about ticks, Lyme disease and other diseases ticks can spread visit the New York State Department of Health, <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/lyme/>.

For more information, contact your local Health Department.

The Western New York Public Health Alliance (WNYPHA) is a not-for-profit organization comprised of the Health Commissioners/Public Health Directors and other community public health leaders from the eight counties of Western New York. Their mission is to support collaboration across WNY to further public health initiatives and priorities. As part of this mission, the WNYPHA works to provide health education and information to prevent disease and improve population health. For more information on this article or the WNYPHA, please contact Christine Schuyler, Public Health Director for Chautauqua County at 716-753-4590 or Lori Ballengee, Public Health Director for Allegany County at 585-268-9250.