



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Lyme Disease Awareness Month

JAMES L. SEWARD April 29, 2010

May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month and with the high number of reported cases in New York, it is important to arm yourself and your family with the tools to avoid the disease when possible, and detect and treat when necessary.

Lyme disease is an infection, caused by bacteria, that is spread by the bite of an infected tick. Lyme disease can affect the skin, joints, nervous system and/or heart. Over 77,000 cases of Lyme disease have been reported to the New York State Department of Health since reporting was first required in 1986. When detected early, it usually can be treated with oral antibiotics. If left untreated, it often causes serious health problems.

The type of tick responsible for spreading Lyme disease in New York is the deer tick. Not all deer ticks carry the bacteria that cause Lyme disease; they become infected after feeding on an infected animal such as a mouse or other small mammal. Transmission from infected ticks does not occur until a tick has been attached and feeding for at least 24 to 36 hours, which is why it is important to always check for ticks after spending time outdoors. You cannot get Lyme disease from another person or an infected animal.

We are entering peak season for deer ticks. They are active when the weather stays above freezing, usually from April through November. Young deer ticks, called nymphs, are active

from mid-May to mid-August and are about the size of poppy seeds. Adult ticks, which are approximately the size of sesame seeds, are most active from March to mid-May and from mid-August to November. The deer tick is very small and orange-brown in color with a black spot near the head. Both nymphs and adults can transmit Lyme disease and their preferred habitats are wooded areas and adjacent grasslands. Lawns and gardens at the edges of woods may also be home to ticks.

Generally, ticks do not jump or fly onto their victims. They wait on vegetation and cling to animals and humans as they brush by. While there is no way to protect yourself completely from being bitten by a tick while in an infested area, there are steps you can take to reduce your risk:

- Stay on the center of trails and paths;
- Wear long pants and long sleeved shirts, and tuck the legs into your socks or boots;
- Wear light colored and tightly woven clothing;
- Use an insect repellent;
- Check yourself, your children and pets for ticks often. Pay special attention to the backs of knees, behind the ears, the scalp, armpits and back.

As soon as you find a tick attached to your skin, remove it. Use tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull out steadily and firmly, making sure the entire tick is removed. After removing the tick, thoroughly disinfect the bite site and wash your hands. See or call a doctor if there are concerns about incomplete tick removal. Do not attempt to remove ticks by using petroleum jelly, lit cigarettes or other home remedies because these may actually increase the chance of contracting a tick-borne disease.

Lyme disease is often hard to diagnose because it has various symptoms that are seen in many other illnesses. Early symptoms appear anywhere from three to thirty days after the

bite of an infected tick. In 60 to 80 percent of the cases, a red rash resembling a bull's eye or solid patch, about two inches in diameter, appears and expands around the site of the bite. The rash may be accompanied with a fever, headache, muscle/joint pain and/or swollen glands.

Early treatment of Lyme disease involves antibiotics and almost always results in a full cure. Medical personnel agree that early diagnosis and treatment are critical in preventing a serious later-stage disease and potentially chronic illness.

By knowing the facts and taking precautions you can enjoy the outdoors and avoid Lyme disease.