



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

Senator Helming: Fight the Bite! Raise Awareness of Lyme Disease

Senator Pam Helming

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ISSUE:

- [Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases](#)
- [Lyme Disease Awareness](#)
- [Task Force On Lyme Disease And Tick-Borne Diseases](#)



GENEVA – Senator Pam Helming is recognizing Lyme Disease Awareness Month during May by highlighting several of the ways in which people can keep themselves safe and help prevent Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. With the temperatures getting warmer and the daylight hours getting longer, people will be outdoors more for work and recreation. Outdoor activity increases their risk of coming into contact with ticks and contracting a disease. New York State continues to be a hotbed for Lyme and tick-borne diseases, with more than 8,700 cases as of 2017, while the Finger Lakes region experienced 365 of those cases in that year.

“Lyme and other tick-borne diseases continue to be a prevalent threat across our region and around our state. Since taking office as State Senator, I have proudly advocated on behalf of those suffering from these illnesses as well as the medical and public health professionals working with them. Last year, my Senate colleagues and I have provided historic funding for research into Lyme and tick-borne diseases and enacted measures aimed at preventing and treating these illnesses.

Unfortunately, the new Senate Majority did not provide funding in the budget to help combat this growing public health concern. Regardless, I will keep working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and local grassroots organizations to educate people on how to keep themselves safe from ticks and to support those who have developed illnesses related to ticks. This issue impacts every area of our state, from upstate to downstate. True prevention starts with knowing how to protect yourself from ticks. I am proud to join the New York State Department of Health and local

Lyme and tick-borne diseases advocates to raise awareness in recognition of Lyme Disease Awareness Month,” Senator Helming said.

The New York State Department of Health offers the following tips to keep you and your family safe as you venture outdoors:

- 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 for ticks while outdoors.
- Use insect repellent.
- Stay on cleared, well-traveled trails. Walk in the center of trails. Avoid dense woods and bushy 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 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, and remove ticks promptly. Also check children and pets.

According to the Department of Health, not all ticks can cause disease and not all bites will make you sick, but as these diseases become more common it is 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. Lyme disease is the most common disease spread by ticks in New York State, but there are other serious diseases spread by ticks. Like Lyme, the other diseases are spreading to other regions across the state.

Ticks live in shady, moist areas at ground level. They will cling to tall grass, brush, and shrubs, usually no more than 18 to 24 inches off the ground. They also live in lawns and gardens, especially at the edges of woods and around old stone walls. Once a tick gets on the skin, it generally climbs upward until it reaches a protected area. In tick-infested areas, your best protection is to avoid contact with soil, leaf litter, and vegetation. However, if you garden, hike, camp, hunt, work or otherwise spend time in the outdoors, you can still protect yourself.

For more resources on Lyme and tick-borne diseases, please contact your local public health department:

- Cayuga County Health Department – (315) 253-1560 or cchealth@cayugacounty.us
- Monroe County Public Health – (585) 753-2991 or mchealth@monroecounty.gov
- Ontario County Public Health – (585) 396-4343 or mary.beer@co.ontario.ny.us
- Seneca County Public Health – (315) 539-1925 or vswinehart@co.seneca.ny.us
- Tompkins County Health Department – (607) 274-6600 or tompkinscountyny.gov/health
- Wayne County Public Health – (315) 946-5749 or wcph@co.wayne.ny.us

Monroe County Public Health Director Dr. Michael Mendoza said, “While we want people to enjoy the outdoors this summer, we want them to do so wisely since summer is an especially active period for ticks carrying Lyme disease. Ticks can crawl on to people or animals when brushed against in wooded areas or tall grass; they become easier to see as they become engorged with blood while attached to the skin. Ticks generally have to be attached to the skin for 36 to 48 hours to transmit Lyme, so prompt removal is important.”

Ontario County Public Health Director Mary Beer said, “Lyme Disease numbers dropped in Ontario County in 2018 from the high numbers seen in 2017. Western New York counties reported a similar experience in 2018. We are hopeful that this is the result of the plethora of public health messaging that occurred in 2018. In addition, the 2017-2018 Ontario County winter weather, the 19th snowiest and 0.03 degrees above-average temperatures (due to a warm February), may have impacted the tick population. Our message continues to be one of prevention and most importantly to check yourself, your children, and pets after every outdoor encounter where ticks might be present. The transfer of Lyme Disease does not occur immediately upon the latching on of a tick. You have time to remove the tick properly. Be diligent in monitoring your health status and contact your health care provider or veterinarian in the event that you or your pets experience any symptoms (bullseye rash, headache, fever, chills, tiredness, and body aches are common early symptoms). If untreated, symptoms can progress to additional rashes, joint swelling and pain, nerve involvement, and heartbeat abnormalities. Your local health department is more than happy to field any questions that you may have. Feel free to reach out.”

Mr. John Messina, founder of Ontario County Lyme Support Group, said, "There are adults and children bedridden or in wheelchairs in our community and across our state because of Lyme disease and co-infectors. There are adults and children being misdiagnosed with autoimmune diseases or undiagnosed with unknown health problems, and it is Lyme disease and co-infectors. Please educate yourself, so you can advocate for yourself about Lyme disease. Go to these sites: LymeDisease.org, Lyme Action Network, Children's Action Network, and ILADS. Check out their Facebook pages. If you ever remove a tick that has been attached to you, save it in a storage bag. You can send it to one of these labs – ticksreport.com or University of Massachusetts. For a fee, they can tell you if the tick is carrying Lyme disease or co-infectors. Ontario County Lyme Support Group would like to thank Senator Helming for her continued voice in Albany for Lyme sufferers."

Ms. Olivia Keller, a recent high school graduate and member of the Ontario County Lyme Support Group said, "Nobody asks for illness. Nobody wants to spend their lives trying to seek validation, answers, and proper treatment from the medical community for unexplained illness. When symptoms as bizarre as Lyme disease and other tick-borne illness cannot be explained because a test fails to accurately paint a picture of what is going on in the human body, medicine fails us. Tick-borne illness is more than just joint pain. It can manifest itself in so many different ways, ranging from brain fog, migraines, and mental illness to night sweats and air hunger to heart palpitations, chest pain, and high blood pressure, all while also wreaking havoc on your digestive system. Due to the strongly intertwined relationship that exists between medicine, Big Pharma, and politics, creating a wave of change of any kind can seem daunting and impossible. But Lyme disease is real and can affect anyone regardless of race, gender, religion, or social status. This is an issue bigger than all of us. It will continue to plague our society if more funding for prevention, treatment, coverage, and education isn't found. We must continue to make change where we can: support the people in politics like Senator Helming who advocate for Lyme disease and overall health and wellness, try natural alternatives to certain ailments instead of relying solely on Big Pharma, and call out the doctors who tell patients they are making up their seemingly unrelated symptoms. Intuition is our greatest gift. Listen to it and never stop seeking answers. Health is the greatest wealth."

In last year's state budget, Senator Helming secured \$1 million to help battle Lyme and tick-borne diseases by raising awareness and increasing research. This money has been and continues to be leveraged to support research at Cornell University,

SUNY Adirondack, and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry into ticks and the diseases they carry, increase public awareness through local public health departments, increase the number of tick collection sites through the state Department of Health, and host a series of Lyme and tick-borne disease forums through Cornell Cooperative Extension. Although the Senate Majority cut this funding in this year's state budget, Senator Helming is continuing to push for additional state funds.

Senator Helming also co-sponsors several bills addressing issues related to Lyme and tick-borne diseases, including:

- S.1247 – Establishes grants to support graduate medical education in Lyme and tick-borne diseases
- S.1306 – Creates a pilot program for Lyme and tick-borne disease testing in children
- S.1307 – Establishes requirements for reporting Lyme and tick-borne diseases after death
- S.1345 – Requires the New York State health care quality and cost containment commission to issue a report on coverage for chronic Lyme disease

As the former Senate Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources and a member of the Senate's Task Force on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases, Senator Helming hosted an Informational Forum on Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases in September 2017 in Canandaigua. At this event, a panel of experts, including representatives from Cornell University, SUNY Upstate Medical University, the Ontario County Public Health Department, and SUNY Adirondack, presented to more than 150 people and answered their questions. When asked if they had been personally affected by Lyme or tick-borne diseases or knew someone who was, the vast majority of the audience raised their hands.