



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Be On the Lookout for Deer Ticks

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Vermont Department of Health

BURLINGTON - Ticks are an unwelcome reality of the warmer weather, especially the deer tick, which can transmit the bacterial infection known as Lyme disease.

Each year, the Health Department and State Entomologist work to raise awareness about deer ticks; a hard-to-see, poppy-seed sized insect with black legs whose bite can lead to severe illness.

“We encourage people to go to our website and see what an actual deer tick looks like. It is important to check your body daily for ticks if you spend any time outdoors in grassy or wooded areas, including your own lawn,” said Erica Berl, an infectious disease epidemiologist for the Health Department. “If you are bitten by a tick, prompt removal can prevent Lyme disease. However, not everyone with Lyme disease remembers being bitten by a tick, so if you develop a suspicious rash – particularly an expanding red rash - or other symptoms of Lyme disease, let your doctor know as soon as possible.”

Lyme disease is treatable with antibiotics, but left untreated it can lead to more serious illness. Early symptoms of Lyme disease include a rash, fatigue, chills and fever, muscle aches, joint pain, headache or swollen lymph nodes. However, in some people, the first recognized symptom may be a swollen and painful joint, nerve problems, or an irregular heartbeat.

A total of 1,322 cases of Lyme disease were reported to the Health Department from 1999-2009, including a season-high 407 cases last year. The number of reported cases from local tick exposure has tripled since 2006. The increase is likely due to a rise in the number of infected ticks as well as a heightened awareness about Lyme disease.

Measures people should take to prevent exposure to ticks include:

- Avoid areas with a lot of ticks as much as possible. Ticks prefer wooded and bushy areas with high grass and a lot of leaf litter.
- Keep ticks off your skin. Wear long pants and tuck your pants into your socks to keep ticks off your skin. Light colored clothing will help you spot ticks more easily.
- Use insect repellents containing DEET on your skin. You can also use the repellent, permethrin, on your clothes. Look for EPA-registered repellents – the registration number is on the label – and follow the instructions on the label carefully.
- Check yourself, your children and your pets for ticks daily, and carefully and promptly remove ticks. Ticks usually need to feed for at least 36 hours in order to transmit Lyme disease, so daily tick checks and prompt removal of ticks can prevent infection.
- Control ticks around your home. Remove leaf litter, tall grass, and brush. Place wood chips or gravel between lawns and wooded areas.
- Consult your veterinarian for information about tick repellents for your pets.

For more information on ticks and Lyme disease visit the Health Department website at: healthvermont.gov.

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