

June 8, 2009

News media calls to David Hass at (630) 682-7979, ext. 7374.

DuPage County Health Department advises protection against tick-borne diseases

The DuPage County Health Department is warning residents to take precautions against tick bites to prevent contracting the diseases they carry. Ticks become most active when the ground temperature is 40 degrees Fahrenheit or more.

Ticks live in and near wooded areas, tall grass and brush. If infected, ticks can transmit diseases including ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tularemia and Lyme disease through their bites.

DuPage County residents with questions about ticks may call the health department at (630) 682-7400.

A person who experiences a rash, or any unexplained illness, accompanied by a fever following a tick bite, should consult a medical professional. It's important for people to recognize the signs and symptoms of tick-borne diseases so treatment with appropriate antibiotics is not delayed. If left untreated, some tick-borne diseases can cause severe illness and may be fatal.

The best way to protect against tick-borne illnesses is to avoid tick bites by taking the following precautions:

- Check your clothing often for ticks climbing toward open skin. Wear white or light-colored long-sleeved shirts and long pants so the tiny ticks are easier to see.
- Tuck long pants into your socks and boots. Wear a head covering or hat for added protection.

(More)

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- Apply insect repellent containing DEET (30 percent or less) to exposed skin (except the face). If you do cover up, use repellents for clothing containing DEET or permethrin to treat clothes (especially pants, socks and shoes) while in locations where ticks may be common. Follow label directions; do not misuse or overuse repellents. Permethrin repellents must be used on clothing only, not on skin.
- Ticks are usually found in ankle- to shin-high grass and weeds. Ticks cannot hop or fly. Walk in the center of trails so weeds do not brush against you.
- “Tick Checks” are an important method of preventing tick-borne diseases. In areas where ticks may be present, be sure and check yourself, children and other family members every two to three hours for ticks. Ticks seldom attach quickly and rarely transmit tick-borne disease until they have been attached for four or more hours.
- If you let your pets outdoors, check them often for ticks. Infected ticks also can transmit disease to them. (Check with your veterinarian about preventive measures against tick-borne diseases.) You are at risk from ticks that “hitch a ride” on your pets, but fall off in your home before they feed.
- Remove any tick promptly. Do not try to burn the tick with a match or cover it with petroleum jelly or nail polish. Do not use bare hands. The best way to remove a tick is to grasp it with fine-point tweezers as close to the skin as possible and gently, but firmly, pull it straight out. Do not twist or jerk the tick. If tweezers are not available, grasp the tick with a piece of cloth or whatever can be used as a barrier between your fingers and the tick. You may want to put the tick in a jar of rubbing alcohol labeled with the date and location of the bite in case you seek medical attention and your physician wishes to have the tick identified.
- Wash the bite area and your hands thoroughly with soap and water; apply an antiseptic to the bite site.
- Keep your grass mowed and keep weeds cut around your home.
- Know the symptoms of tick-borne disease and consult your physician if you have a fever and a rash or unexplained flu-like illness (without a cough) following a tick bite.

For more information about ticks, Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, ehrlichiosis and tularemia, log on to the Illinois Department of Public Health’s web site at www.idph.state.il.us/public/hbhome.htm.

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT

News Release

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