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

DuPage County Health Department reminds Residents about deer ticks that carry Lyme disease

DuPage County residents who enjoy autumn walks in wooded areas are reminded that deer ticks (infected with the bacterium that causes Lyme disease) are still active in DuPage County and will remain active into November and even December if weather is mild.

Deer ticks (also known as blacklegged ticks) have been identified in DuPage County during the past two years. Health officials say the likelihood of contracting Lyme disease in DuPage County remains very low.

At least 15 species of ticks occur in Illinois. The American dog tick was also identified in DuPage County last year.

The peak time for tick activity is mid April through the end of July, but can extend into late fall if temperatures remain mild. Most cases of tick-borne diseases occur in June, July and August.

If residents live near or visit wooded areas or areas with tall grass and weeds, health officials suggest the following precautions to help prevent tick bites and decrease the risk of disease:

- Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, long trousers, boots or sturdy shoes and a head covering. (Ticks are easier to detect on light-colored clothing.) Tuck trouser cuffs in socks. Tape the area where pants and socks meet so ticks cannot crawl under clothing.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET primarily to clothes. Apply repellents sparingly to exposed skin. Do not apply to the face. Be sure and wash treated skin after coming indoors. Use repellents containing permethrin to treat clothes (especially pants and socks and shoes) but not skin. Always follow label directions; do not misuse or overuse repellents. Always supervise children in the use of repellents.
- Walk in the center of trails so weeds do not brush against you. In camping areas, individuals who sit on the ground or disturb leaf litter on the forest floor may encounter ticks.
- Check yourself, children and other family members every two to three hours for ticks. Most ticks seldom attach quickly and rarely transmit disease organisms until they have been attached four or more hours. If your pets spend time outdoors, check them for ticks, too.
- If ticks are crawling on the outside of clothes, they can be removed with masking tape or cellophane tape. A ring of tape can be made around the hand by leaving the sticky side out and attaching the two ends. Ticks will stick to the tape, which can then be folded over and then placed in the trash.

(More)

(Page 2)

- Remove any tick promptly. The mouthparts of a tick are barbed and may remain embedded and lead to infection at the bite site if not removed promptly. Do not burn the tick with a match or cover it with petroleum jelly or nail polish. Do not use bare hands to remove the tick because tick secretions may carry disease. The best way to remove a tick is to grasp it firmly with 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 tissue or cloth or whatever can be used as a barrier between your fingers and the tick. Placing them in a container of soapy water or alcohol, sticking them to tape or flushing them down the toilet can safely dispose of ticks.
- Wash the bite area and your hands thoroughly with soap and water and apply an antiseptic to the bite site.
- If you have an unexplained illness with fever, contact a physician. Be sure to tell the physician if you have been outdoors in areas where ticks were present or traveled to areas where tick-borne diseases are common.

Make sure the property around your home is unattractive to ticks. Because ticks are sensitive to dry conditions and do not thrive in short vegetation, they are seldom a problem in well-maintained lawns.

Free-roaming dogs and cats are much more likely to encounter ticks than those that are confined to the home or yard. If ticks are found on pets, contact your veterinarian for information about appropriate tick treatment.

Ticks can spread various diseases, including ehrlichiosis, Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia. Fact sheets on these diseases are available on the Illinois Department of Public Health's website, www.idph.state.il.us.

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