



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

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Lyme Disease Cases Rise in Wisconsin
May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month

MADISON -- State health officials today marked Lyme Disease Awareness Month by reporting a significant increase in the number of reported Lyme disease cases in Wisconsin.

“In Wisconsin residents, 1,819 cases of Lyme disease were reported in 2007—a significant increase over reported cases in 2006,” said Dr. Sheri Johnson, State Health Officer. She noted there were 1,456 cases in 2006.

Johnson added that the 2007 figure could rise, because the Division of Public Health has not yet received final reports of cases from 2007.

“While Lyme disease has been reported in many areas around Wisconsin, most cases in 2007 occurred in the northwestern and west central regions of the state,” Johnson said.

“We remind everyone to be on the lookout for ticks that can cause Lyme disease, and to take steps to protect themselves,” Johnson said. “In Wisconsin, most people who develop Lyme disease are exposed to infected ticks between May and August. The greatest risk of developing the illness is during June and July.”

Lyme disease is caused by a bacteria carried by small ticks called deer ticks, which are found in many parts of the U.S., including Wisconsin. The disease can cause debilitating arthritis as well as serious heart and nervous system problems.

The disease is treated with antibiotics, and is more easily treated when detected early. One early symptom of Lyme disease is a characteristic “bull’s-eye” rash known as erythema migrans (EM) usually 3 days to 30 days after the bite of an infected tick. The EM rash consists of a reddened area, often with a clear area in the middle, at the original site of the tick bite. The rash typically expands in size to cover a large area (usually greater than two inches) over a period of days or weeks, or may even appear in several places on other parts of the body.

“An infected tick has to be attached to a person’s skin for at least 24 hours before it can transmit the Lyme disease bacteria. Most people infected with Lyme disease will develop the EM rash but not everyone develops the skin rash,” Johnson said. “It’s important to consult a physician immediately if you have been bitten by a deer tick and are developing symptoms such as fever, headache, chills, pain in the muscles or joints, enlarged lymph nodes, or facial paralysis.”

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There are some preventive measures people can take to avoid tick bites and reduce the chance of getting Lyme disease. These precautions include:

- Avoid wooded and bushy areas with high grass and lots of leaf litter since ticks prefer these areas. If you do go into areas like this, try to stay in the center of a cleared trail to avoid contact with overgrown grass, and brush.
- Use effective tick repellants and apply according to the label instructions. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults use repellants with 20-30% DEET on exposed skin and clothing to prevent tick bites. Repellants that contain permethrin can also be applied to clothing.
- Wear clothes that will help to shield you from ticks. Long-sleeved shirts and long pants are best. Tuck your pants into the top of your socks or boots, to create a “tick barrier.” Light-colored clothing will make any ticks easier to spot.
- Landscape homes and recreational areas to reduce the number of ticks and create tick-safe zones by using woodchips or gravel along the border between lawn and wooded area. It is also important to continue to remove leaf litter, clear tall grass and brush around the houses through out the summer.
- Check frequently for ticks, and remove them promptly. Ticks actually have to bite you and remain attached for at least 24 hours to transmit Lyme disease. Deer ticks are small and may be difficult to find, so tick checks must be done on all parts of the body carefully and thoroughly.
- Remove attached ticks slowly and gently, using a thin-bladed pair of tweezers. Avoid folk remedies like petroleum jelly, nail polish remover or burning matches – they are not a safe or effective way to remove ticks.

Protect your pets from tick bites by checking your dog or cat for ticks before allowing them inside. While there is a vaccine available for pets to prevent Lyme disease, it will not stop the animal from bringing ticks into the home. Speak to your veterinarian about topical tick repellant available for pets.

For more information go to: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/LymeDisease/index.htm>

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