



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Summer Weather Brings Tick Season

Health officials remind Marylanders of simple precautions

BALTIMORE, MD (June 1, 2006) -- Now that the region has experienced its first wave of summer temperatures and people are spending more time outside, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) reminds Maryland residents that tick season is in full swing.

Illnesses such as Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF) can be spread by tick bites and there are simple precautions you can take to avoid exposure.

“It is very important for people to avoid areas where ticks live,” said Dr. Michelle A. Gourdine, DHMH deputy secretary for Public Health Services. “Wearing protective clothing and performing tick checks is an easy way to further reduce the risk of infection.”

Examples of protective attire include lightweight, light-colored clothing with long sleeves and long pants. Make sure pants legs are tucked into socks and shirts are tucked into pants.

Your body should be checked for ticks after spending time outdoors, particularly in wooded, tall grass or brush areas. Also, be sure to check your children and pets every day.

Tick-borne infections are public health problems for people of all ages.

Biting ticks must remain attached to the human body for at least several hours to transmit disease. It can take up to 24 hours of feeding to transmit Lyme disease, but as few as four to six hours to be infected with RMSF.

Therefore, finding a tick and removing it quickly, before it has a chance to attach or to feed remains essential.

To remove a tick safely, use tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull straight back and up with a slow steady force. If you are without tweezers, use your fingers but protect them by using a glove or tissue. Do not attempt to burn the tick with a match or “smother” it with petroleum jelly, alcohol, or nail polish.

The use of tick repellants may also be considered. Repellants are available over the counter, however, please be sure to read package instructions carefully before use, especially on children.

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Confirmed cases of Lyme disease in Maryland rose 39 percent from 2004 to 2005, according to DHMH. There were 1,235 confirmed cases reported in 2005, as compared to 891 cases in 2004. There were 75 confirmed and probable cases of RMSF in 2005, 72 cases in 2004.

Health department officials believe the rise in Lyme disease reporting is due in part to increased emphasis on surveillance at the local level.

“Many local jurisdictions are making every effort to maximize their available resources to detect Lyme disease,” Dr. Gourdine said. “This helps to ensure accurate and thorough investigation of Lyme disease cases.”

Significant increases have been reported in Frederick, Montgomery and Prince George’s counties in the National Capital area of Maryland and in the Baltimore metropolitan region. Montgomery County, for example, reports a five-fold increase in confirmed cases from 38 in 2004 to 216 in 2005. Carroll County confirmed 140 cases in 2005, an 86 percent increase over the 75 cases recorded in 2004.

Officials believe that better recognition of Lyme disease signs and symptoms among healthcare providers and members of the public, along with increased awareness of tick exposure due to recreational or occupational activity, also have contributed to the rise in documented cases.

The most common symptom of Lyme disease is a circular, reddish rash enlarging from the site of a tick bite. The center of the rash is typically pale with a red rim, giving the appearance of a “bull’s eye.” Flu-like symptoms (headaches, fever, chills, tiredness, rash, muscle/joint aches or pain) occur within three to 32 days after a bite from an infected tick. Like most tick-borne diseases, Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics under the care of a health care provider.

In addition to Lyme disease and RMSF, ticks may carry other infectious organisms that cause human disease such as ehrlichiosis, babesiosis, and even tularemia.

Currently, there are no vaccines to prevent any tick-borne diseases, so avoiding tick bites remains the key to prevention.

Although prevention is best, seek medical care if you develop any symptoms that you suspect are due to tick-borne disease. The diagnosis of tick-borne diseases requires a visit to a health care provider to evaluate the signs and symptoms. Often blood tests are ordered and treatment may be started pending results of the tests.

More information about tick-borne diseases is available through your local health department or on the DHMH Web site by clicking on ‘Fact Sheets’, then ‘Lyme Disease’ at www.edcp.org. Additional information is available at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at www.cdc.gov.

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