

INFORMATION ABOUT TICKS:

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Christie Administration Encourages Residents to Take Steps to Reduce Risk of Lyme Disease

The New Jersey Department of Health is reminding residents who spend time outdoors to take preventive measures and be aware of the signs and symptoms of Lyme disease. First discovered in Lyme, Connecticut in 1975, Lyme disease is a bacterial infection spread through the bite of an infected deer tick. Lyme disease is the most frequently reported tick-borne disease in the United States.

"Reducing exposure to ticks is the best way to protect yourself and your family against Lyme disease," said Health Commissioner Mary E. O'Dowd. "As children spend more time outside this spring, summer and fall, it is important for parents to remember to routinely check their children and themselves to avoid exposure to the disease."

Ticks that transmit the disease are active during the spring, summer and fall. However, May, June and July are the peak season because immature ticks are present at that time. These ticks are smaller than adult ticks and less likely to be detected due to their small size.

Residents can protect themselves from tick bites by:

- avoiding tick-infested areas such as tall grass and dense vegetation
- keeping grass cut and underbrush thinned in yards
- ensuring areas under bird feeders are clean to avoid attracting deer and other mammals
- keeping picnic tables, swing sets and other recreation equipment away from woods
- following directions carefully if lawn chemicals are used for tick control

People should also wear solid, light-colored clothing to help spot ticks. Tucking pants into socks also will help prevent a tick from attaching to your skin. Use of insect repellent-for people and pets-is also recommended, along with a full-body exam after being outdoors.

Lyme disease is spread to people by the bite of an infected tick. In New Jersey, Lyme disease is transmitted by the deer tick (or black-legged tick, *Ixodes scapularis*). Immature

ticks become infected by feeding on infected white-footed mice and other small mammals, such as meadow voles. Deer ticks can also spread other tick-borne diseases.

In New Jersey, 3,200 new cases of Lyme disease are diagnosed every year. Early symptoms of Lyme disease include flu-like symptoms that resemble other illnesses. Symptoms appear three to 30 days after the bite of an infected tick.

The most common symptoms include:

- a rash that looks like a bull's-eye (occurs in 60 - 80% of people who become infected)
- tiredness
- fever
- headache
- stiff neck
- muscle aches
- joint pain

Antibiotic treatment is most effective in the early stages of the disease. If left untreated, weeks to months later some people may also have arthritis, neurological or heart problems.

In order to transmit the bacterium that causes Lyme disease, a tick must be attached for a minimum of 36 hours. Therefore, it is important to properly remove a tick from the skin within 36 hours of being bitten in order to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

To safely remove a tick:

- use fine-pointed tweezers
- grasp the tick's mouth parts close to the skin.
- apply steady outward pressure
- do not use petroleum jelly, noxious chemicals, or hot objects to remove ticks. Improper removal can increase the chances of infection.

For more information about Lyme disease, please visit: <http://nj.gov/health/cd/lyme/index.shtml>