

May 10, 2005

For Immediate Release

From: The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month

Contact: Steve Todd, Director of Environmental Health

Phone: 279-9561 x 106

Lyme Disease in Michigan

(Spring is in the air, and on your shirt!!)

Since its discovery in the early 1980's, Lyme disease has become the most reported vector-borne disease in the United States. In 2000, about 16,000 cases were reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This increase in cases is due to many factors, some include

- Increased surveillance and understanding of the disease system
- The movement of people out of cities into more rural environments brings them into the habitat of the black-legged tick
- Forest fragmentation and increasing deer populations
- Dispersal of the black-legged tick into new, receptive habitats, including Michigan.

Lyme disease is endemic (prevalent) in much of the North Central United States including Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania, and now Michigan. Historically, the only endemic region in Michigan has been Menominee County in the Upper Peninsula, bordering a highly endemic region of Wisconsin. Recently, however, populations of infected black-legged ticks have been found in Southwest Michigan (Berrien, Cass, Van Buren, Allegan, and Ottawa Counties). In Michigan, the first official reported human case of Lyme disease was in 1985. Cases have now been reported in both the upper and lower peninsula although most cases are still acquired out-of-state. However, states very close to us, including Wisconsin and Minnesota have both reported case numbers in the thousands and are both in the top 10 states reporting Lyme disease nationally. It is anticipated that the number of cases reported will continue to increase due to public education, and expanding tick ranges. It is always sensible to use precautions when recreating in wooded areas. Over the counter products containing DEET or permethrins **ARE EFFECTIVE** against ticks.

Be aware of Lyme disease, but do not be so concerned that you cannot enjoy the outdoors. The risk of developing the illness is minimal in Michigan and even if infection occurs the disease can be diagnosed and treated with antibiotics. There is no vaccine against Lyme disease at this time. There is very little risk of hunters contracting Lyme disease when pursuing game. This is because hunters are in the woods from October through March when ticks are inactive. Even though the adult stage of the tick is active in the fall (when temperatures are above 40° F), the heavier clothing that hunters wear makes it difficult for ticks to find and attach to bare skin. Your best protection is to wear light colored clothing and to try to stay out of heavily wooded areas. And always check your clothing and skin for tick after you have been in the woods.

For additional information about Lyme Disease and other health information, please visit our web site at:

www.bhsj.org