

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lyme Disease in Michigan: Prevention, Symptoms and Treatment

Spring and summer are upon us and so are the pesky insects that come with the seasons. While you are out enjoying the weather with your family and friends, be sure to take the necessary precautions to prevent tick bites that can cause Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is an infection caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which can be transmitted by the bite of some ticks. The disease may start as a skin rash and can progress to more serious stages involving joint, nerve or heart tissue. Antibiotics are usually effective, especially if treatment starts early in the disease process. Not all ticks carry a disease causing organism, and a bite does not always result in the development of disease-even if the tick is a carrier.

There were about 30,000 confirmed cases of Lyme disease in the United States in 2009, only 81 of which were confirmed in Michigan. Rates increased in 2010 to 93 confirmed cases in Michigan. So far this year, 15 cases have been confirmed in 2011- none of which were in the Branch, Hillsdale, and St. Joseph Tri-county area. However, between 2008 and 2010, the tri-counties did have seven confirmed cases. "We must take extra precautions in May, June, and July. This is when ticks that transmit Lyme disease are most active," says Environmental Health Director Rebecca Burns.

Although the risk of contracting Lyme disease in Michigan is rare, it is always a possibility. There are many safety measures that can be taken to even further reduce this risk, including:

- Avoid tick habitats such as tall grass, bushes, brush, and woods.
- Wear appropriate clothing if entrance into these habitats is necessary – hat, long sleeved shirt, long pants, tucked in socks.

- Use of tick repellants such as over the counter products that contain DEET or permethrins which are effective against ticks. (When applying sunscreen AND repellant at the same time, use sunscreen first, followed by the repellant.)
- Before coming indoors, brush off clothing.
- Once inside, remove all clothing, check for ticks, and promptly wash clothing.

Even after taking all precautions to prevent a tick bite, a tick may still attach.

Remember: to the body, there is a proper way to remove and dispose of it. **DO NOT REMOVE THE TICK WITH YOUR FINGERS.** To properly remove a tick from the body, use a tick-removing device or fine point tweezers. Do not squeeze the body of the tick, but grasp it where its mouthparts enter the skin and tug gently and repeatedly until it releases from the skin. Save the tick in a covered jar labeled with the date and where you think you acquired the tick and check with your local health department if you want to have the tick identified.

Call your doctor at once if you notice a red rash forming around the tick bite site or if you experience flu-like symptoms including fatigue, headache, neck stiffness, jaw discomfort, pain or stiffness in muscles or joints, slight fever, swollen glands, or reddening of the eyes. If untreated, Lyme disease can progress to more serious stages. In the later stages, the joints, the heart and the central nervous system can be involved. Lyme disease is more easily treated in the early stages of the disease, but usually responds to antibiotic treatment in the later stages of the disease, too.

To learn more about ticks and Lyme disease, or more about other environmental health concerns, contact the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency local office or check out our website at www.bhsj.org.

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