

**Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency**

**May 21, 2012**

**Contact: Dr. James Phillips, Medical Director  
517-279-9561, ext. 134  
Rebecca Burns, Environmental Health Director  
269-273-2161, ext. 228**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Tick Time!**

Ticks are out and in full force! The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to remind you to take the necessary precautions to avoid contracting Lyme Disease. Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected blacklegged tick. Blacklegged ticks are also known as deer ticks or bear ticks. You may be thinking, “Why should I be concerned about Lyme Disease?” Since the early 1980’s, Lyme disease has become the most reported vector-borne disease in the United States.

Lyme disease is now endemic in parts of the Northeast, Northwest and much of North Central United States; this includes Michigan. Menominee County, located in the Upper Peninsula, used to be the only Michigan county categorized as an ‘endemic county’ – meaning that infected tick populations had been confirmed and/or two or more locally exposed human cases had been identified. However, populations of infected blacklegged ticks have now been found in 19 Michigan counties that border Lake Michigan. Many hundreds of ticks have been tested for disease bacteria, and up to 45 percent of them tested positive for Lyme disease. (see attached [map](#) of endemic counties in Michigan). These counties are considered as ‘known risk’ places for contracting Lyme Disease. An additional 18 counties that are adjacent to the endemic counties have been identified as potential risk places for Lyme Disease.

Why is there a rise in Lyme disease cases? There are several reasons, including: increased surveillance and understanding of the disease system, the movement of people out of cities into more rural environments which brings them into closer proximity with the preferred habitat of the blacklegged tick; forest fragmentation and increasing deer populations which has led to the dispersal of the blacklegged tick into new, and receptive habitats. Not to worry, there are many things you can do to prevent getting a tick bite. If you know you are going to be in an area that may be tick infested, use the following tips to protect yourself:

- Wear light colored clothing so ticks can be spotted more easily and removed before attachment.
- Wearing long sleeved shirts and pants tucked into socks or boot tops can be helpful in keeping ticks from reaching your skin.
- Ticks are usually located close to the ground, so boots or shoes are recommended, not sandals!
- Applying insect repellent such as DEET to clothes and exposed skin can reduce the risk of tick attachment.

The transmission of the bacteria that causes Lyme disease from an infected tick is unlikely to occur before 36 hours of tick attachment so daily checks for ticks and prompt removal will help prevent infection. According to Dr. Phillips, Medical Director of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, "If you find a tick that needs to be removed, the best way to remove it is to use fine-tip tweezers to grasp the tick firmly and as closely to the skin as possible. Using a steady motion, pull the tick's body away from the skin. Do NOT use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish or any other

product.” Dr Phillips also acknowledged that it’s possible for the tick’s mouthparts to remain in the skin, but do not worry as the Lyme disease is contained in the midgut or salivary glands. He adds “Be sure to cleanse the area with an antiseptic after the tick has been removed.”

Below are listed some landscaping tips which can help prevent your yard from becoming a habitat for the blacklegged ticks:

- Clear tall grasses and brush around homes and at the edge of lawns.
- Place a 3 foot wide barrier of wood chips or gravel between lawns and wooded areas and around patios and play equipment. This will restrict tick migration into recreational areas.
- Mow the lawn frequently and keep leaves raked.
- Stack wood neatly in a dry area.
- Keep playground equipment, decks, and patios away from yard edges and trees and place them in a sunny location, if possible.
- Remove any old furniture, mattresses or trash from the yard that may give ticks a place to hide.
- Ask your veterinarian to recommend tick control methods for your pets. Animals can get Lyme disease but they do not transmit these diseases to humans. Remember, however, pets can bring ticks into your house.

The best way to avoid a tick bite is simply avoiding areas whenever possible that are likely to be infested with ticks. The blacklegged tick prefers habitats that are shaded or wooded that has deciduous trees and large undergrowth. They can also be found in grassy areas or areas covered with brush. In Southwest Michigan, blacklegged ticks

have been found in habitats characterized by sandy soil, oak or maple dominated tree-cover, and areas with an abundance of rodents and white-tailed deer. Areas along the coast of Lake Michigan have the characteristics of a good tick habitat.

How will you know if you have been infected? Three to thirty days after a tick bite you may experience a red, expanding rash called erythema migrans (EM), fatigue, chills, fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, and swollen lymph nodes. If you experience any of these symptoms after being exposed to a tick, see your doctor immediately. If it goes untreated, the infection may spread from the site of the bite to other parts of the body producing some specific symptoms that may come and go: spreading of erythema migrans to different parts of the body and possibly creating a bulls-eye pattern, facial or bells palsy, severe headaches and neck stiffness, pain and swelling in the large joints, shooting pains that may interfere with sleep and heart palpitations and dizziness due to changes in the heartbeat.

Lyme disease is diagnosed based on the signs and symptoms you are experiencing and looking at your history of possible exposure to infected blacklegged ticks. Laboratory tests are also helpful to confirm the diagnosis. If you are treated with the appropriate antibiotics in the early stages of the disease, usually you will recover rapidly and completely. Approximately 10-20% of patients, following the appropriate antibiotic treatment, may have persistent or recurrent symptoms and are considered to have Post-treatment Lyme disease syndrome. These symptoms could include fatigue, pain, or joint and muscle aches.

Lyme disease is an important topic to be aware of as you go outside to enjoy the great outdoors this summer. By knowing about where the disease is endemic and

taking the precautions outlined above, it can be preventable. Enjoy the outdoors but watch out for ticks!

**###**