



Health Alert: Lyme Disease Cases Rise Sharply in Granite State

Protect yourself and your family

Reported cases of Lyme Disease in New Hampshire jumped from 271 in 2005 to 617 last year, according to the N.H. Division of Public Health Services.

Caused by a bite from an infected blacklegged tick (formerly known as the "deer tick"), the bacterial illness disease is treatable in its early stages, but can lead to serious complications if left untreated. UNH Cooperative Extension entomologist Alan Eaton says **the worst time for bites is from May through mid -July**, when young ticks, called nymphs, are biting.



USDA-ARS - photo

"New Hampshire is home to many other species of ticks, but the others don't spread Lyme Disease," said Eaton. "The blacklegged tick itself becomes infected with Lyme Disease-causing bacteria by feeding on an infected reservoir host, an organism that carries high levels of the bacteria in its bloodstream. In New Hampshire, the primary reservoir host for Lyme disease is the white-footed mouse."

Blacklegged tick must feed a day or longer to infect

The ticks encounter hosts, including humans, by climbing on tall grass, shrubs or weeds, where they wait for something to come along, holding several legs outstretched. When they are touched by fur, hair, your skin or clothing, they grab on and climb aboard. Then they crawl around in search of an appropriate location on which to attach and feed. The attachment bite is usually painless and goes unnoticed. A blood meal takes several days to complete.

"Because it takes 30 or more hours for an adult blacklegged tick to infect you after it attaches to your body, **doing a tick check every night before you go to bed** will greatly reduce your chances of getting Lyme disease," said Eaton. "An adult blacklegged tick that's just begun to feed will appear about the size of a sesame seed, but it can reach the size of a small grape as it becomes engorged with your blood."

More infected ticks than expected

A study done in spring 2004 by Eaton and Eleanor Lacombe of the Maine Medical Center Research Institute, found the percentage of infected blacklegged ticks in N.H. was much higher than expected. Eaton said more than half the approximately 50 adult ticks sampled in Lee and Durham and more than 70 percent in Concord were infected with the bacteria that causes Lyme Disease.

"Although reported cases of Lyme Disease have been concentrated around the Seacoast and in

the southeastern part of the state, from eastern Hillsborough County through Rockingham and Strafford counties, there are many areas in the state where ticks have not been tested, and much about ticks is still unknown," Eaton says, urging all New Hampshire residents to take simple precautions to protect themselves.

Keep yourself safe

To reduce your chances of getting Lyme Disease, Eaton suggests the following:

- Tuck pant legs into socks before a trip into woods or fields.
- Check your entire body thoroughly for ticks after a day outdoors (common sites of attachment include the underarms, the groin, behind the knee, and the nape of the neck).
- Use insect repellent on socks and pant legs (most effective repellants contain either Deet, called n,n-dimethyl-m-toluamide, or picaridin).
- Wear light-colored clothing (to help locate ticks easily).
- Stay close to the center of trails (avoid brushing against vegetation).
- Keep grass mowed.
- Remove brush piles (brush provides animal nesting sites).

Since tick bites are painless, ticks are often discovered after they have begun to feed. To remove a tick, grasp it with tweezers only (bent "needle nose" tweezers work the best), around its head and close to the skin. Pull the tick out slowly and firmly. Disinfect the bite afterward with antiseptic.

If possible save the tick for identification. For proper identification place the tick in a stoppered vial and send or bring to:

[UNH Cooperative Extension Arthropod Identification Laboratory](#)

117 Spaulding Hall
38 College Road
University of New Hampshire
Durham, NH 03824-3544

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