

Tick – Borne Diseases

The best protection against acquiring a tick-borne disease is to avoid ticks. That may be very difficult this year because of a milder winter in the Northeast. This has caused a dramatic increase in the tick population. The milder weather allowed the ticks to survive and reproduce in greater numbers. Ticks that can transmit illnesses have expanded their geographic range and now are being found in places they weren't seen twenty years ago according to experts at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and prevention. Reforestation and increased deer populations are contributing to the expanding tick distribution.

Ticks carry not only bacterial diseases such as Lyme disease, but also viral illnesses such as Powassan. Powassan is a relatively new tick-borne disease that has been spreading. Signs and symptoms of Powassan can include fever, headache, vomiting, weakness, confusion, seizures and memory loss. Long term neurological damage and even death can occur. There is no specific treatment for Powassan except supportive care such as IV fluids and medications to reduce the swelling in the brain.

Since the 1990's, the number of Lyme disease cases in the U.S. has tripled. In 2015 alone, about 30,000 cases of Lyme disease were reported in America. To protect yourself from a tick-borne infection, the CDC recommends:

- Learning which tick-borne diseases are common in your area
- Avoiding places with thick vegetation, high grass and leaf litter
- Walking in the center of trails
- Using repellent that contains 20% or more DEET on exposed skin for protection that lasts several hours
- Using products that contain permethrin to treat clothing and gear such as boots, pants, socks and tents, or wearing clothing pretreated with permethrin
- Bathing or showering as soon as possible after potential exposure to wash off ticks before they bite
- Removing all attached ticks as soon as possible
- Treating dogs with products that kill and/or repel ticks
- Examining gear and pets. Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, then attach to a person later.
- Drying clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come inside.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov.

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