

Health Department Helps to Prevent Tick-Borne Diseases

Our community offers beautiful areas to enjoy the “great outdoors” and we all like to spend time outside when the weather is nice. We must, however, be very mindful of ticks and the problems tick bites can cause. In 2014, the Hanover Township Health Department had over 200 reports of Lyme disease, one of the most common tick-borne diseases within its catchment area of Whippany, Cedar Knolls, Morris and Harding Townships. This indicates that we are at an increased risk of tick-borne diseases, some that can have long term debilitating effects. It is the responsibility of the health department to educate its residents of such potential health risks.

Here are some “tick facts”. Ticks are arachnids (of the spider family), so they have 8 legs, no wings. Ticks carry diseases in their bellies and transmit the bacteria by sucking the blood of their victims. There are a variety of ticks, each with different physical characteristics and each causing different illnesses. It is the Black-legged tick that carries the Lyme bacterium.

Ticks can be extremely tiny - or easy to spot, depending on the type, age and stage of the tick. Ticks are usually “carried” by other animals to humans. They regularly hitch rides on birds, mice and deer especially.

Deer do not carry Lyme disease though. The white-footed mouse is actually the culprit. The tick nymph feeds on the mouse and becomes infected. The tick then grows a bit, possibly taking a ride on a bird or a deer into our garden or path. It is when the tick must feed again, that it transmits the Lyme.

Ticks can attach to any part of the human body but are often found in hard-to-see areas such as the groin, armpits, and scalp. In most cases, the tick must be attached for 36 to 48 hours or more before the Lyme disease bacterium can be transmitted. If you find a tick, you need to remove it immediately. Report it to your doctor and record that day on your calendar. The Health Department can help you identify the type of tick and provide literature about tick-borne diseases.

Some doctors will choose to take a blood titer immediately so that in a few weeks, a second one can be taken to use as a comparison. Other practitioners may prefer to wait for other indicators such as a red, expanding rash called erythema migran (EM), fatigue, chills, fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, and swollen lymph nodes.

The tick-borne disease rashes vary in appearance and although they can be very clear indicators of disease, sometimes they are translated as something else. Physicians will often ask the patient to watch for these symptoms for up to 6 weeks after a tick bite. But living in this area, one should always be on the lookout for symptoms since a tick bite or even the rash can go undetected. If you feel like you have the “flu” in the summer, think Lyme disease and see you physician.

Untreated Lyme can do permanent damage to joints, the heart and nervous system. These can be debilitating conditions that could have been prevented with simple antibiotics. Being aware of our surroundings and risks is the first step to prevention.

While it is a good idea to take preventive measures against ticks year-round, be extra vigilant in warmer months (April-September) when ticks are most active. Suggested methods of prevention are the use of repellents that contain 20 to 30% DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) on exposed skin and clothing for protection that lasts up to several hours. Always follow product instructions. Parents should apply this product to their children, avoiding hands, eyes, and mouth. When walking outside wear long pants and a light colored long sleeve shirt allowing for a tick to be seen easily. Tuck pants into socks. Try to avoid walking in tall grassy areas and stay on trails, walking in the middle of trail. After your outing, remove all clothes and visually inspect for any ticks or red areas.



The Township of Hanover Health Department offers pictorial information on how to identify ticks.

It also is selling tick removal spoons. This removal tool makes the very tedious removal process quick and easy and keeps the tick intact so it can be identified. They are \$5.00 each. If you would like to arm yourself with more information and this very valuable tool, please visit one of our following locations: the Hanover Township Health Department at 1000 Rte. 10, Whippany, or the Morris Township Health Department at 50 Woodland Avenue, Convent Station.

Find and Remove Ticks from Your Body

- Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within 2 hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you.
- Conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body upon return from tick-infested areas. Parents should check their children for ticks under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist, and especially in their hair.
- Examine gear and pets. Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, then attach to a person later, so carefully examine pets, coats, and day packs.
- Tumble clothes in a dryer on high heat for an hour to kill remaining ticks. (Some research suggests that shorter drying times may also be effective, particularly if the clothing is not wet.)