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NEWS RELEASE - June
Lyme Disease

Spring is here, which means it's time for New Yorkers to take precautions to protect themselves from Lyme disease. Lyme disease has become an important public health problem in New York State.

"Lyme disease is spread by the bite of infected deer ticks," said the Otsego County Department of Health.

"Ticks cannot fly or jump. They like to rest on low-lying vegetation and attach to a passing animal or person. Once on a body, ticks often attach to the more hidden areas such as the groin, armpits and scalp," warned the Otsego County Department of Health.

Campers, hikers, outdoor workers and others who frequent wooded and tall grassy areas will be more likely exposed to ticks. Because new homes are often built in wooded areas, transmission of Lyme disease near homes can be a concern in some areas of the state. The risk of exposure to ticks is greatest along trails in the woods and on the edges of properties with tall vegetation, but ticks may also be carried by animals and pets into lawns and gardens.

Early stages of Lyme disease are usually marked by one or more of the following symptoms and signs: fatigue, chills and fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, swollen lymph nodes, and/or a "bull's eye" red rash appearing on the skin at the site of the bite.

Lyme disease is often difficult to diagnose, because its symptoms and signs mimic those of many other diseases. Left untreated, Lyme disease can produce severe arthritis, or cause neurological or cardiac problems. However, with early detection and treatment with antibiotics, recovery from Lyme disease is usually rapid and complete.

"Domestic animals, such as dogs and outdoor cats, may become infected with Lyme disease bacteria, and some of these animals may develop arthritis," warned the Otsego County Department of Health.

Dogs appear to be more at risk from Lyme disease. Symptoms in dogs include lethargy, joint pain, fever, fatigue and kidney damage. While there is debate about whether cats suffer from Lyme disease, cats are thought to be highly resistant to the disease.

You can decrease you and your family's chances of being bitten by a tick by following a few precautions:

- When in wooded and grassy areas which are likely to be tick-infested, wear light-colored clothing (to spot ticks) and tuck pants into socks and shirt into pants.
- After every two to three hours outdoors, check for ticks on clothing or skin. Brush off any ticks on clothing before they can attach to your skin. Also, check your children and pets for ticks.
- Do a thorough tick-check of your entire body at the end of the day. Pay particular attention to the back of the knees, behind the ears, the scalp, the armpits and your back.
- If you decide to use tick repellent, apply carefully following label directions.
- Children may be at greater risk for reactions to repellents, in part because their exposure may be greater. Do not apply repellents directly to children. Apply to your own hands and then put it on the child. Never apply to the hands of small children.
- No one should apply repellents near eyes, nose or mouth. Also, use it sparingly around ears.

If any ticks are found, they should be removed immediately. Use fine-tipped tweezers to carefully grasp the mouth-parts of the tick close to the skin, and then gently and steadily pull the tick out without twisting or squeezing.

After removing the tick, wash the bite area thoroughly, apply antiseptic, and mark the area to watch for symptoms. Gasoline, kerosene, petroleum jelly or hot matches should never be used to remove ticks.

For more information about Lyme disease, call the Otsego County Department of Health at 607-547-4230 or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.nyhealth.gov.

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