



**State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services**

**Jim Doyle, Governor
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Lyme Disease Remains a Health Threat in Wisconsin

As warmer weather increases time spent outdoors, state health officials report that Lyme disease illnesses in Wisconsin remain at high levels.

“Everyone should take precautions against tick bites, especially between May and August when people are more likely to be exposed,” said Dr. Seth Foldy, State Health Officer. “Deer ticks are often hard to see— they range from about a poppy seed to a sesame seed in size, but the tick’s size increases after feeding on its host. It is important to check yourself often for ticks, paying special attention to the head, scalp, armpit, groin and area behind the knee.”

Lyme disease is caused by a bacteria carried by deer ticks, which are found in many parts of the U. S. including Wisconsin. One early symptom of Lyme disease is a characteristic “bull’s-eye” rash known as erythema migrans (EM), which appears typically between 3 to 30 days after the bite of an infected tick.

The EM rash consists of a reddened area, often with a clear area in the middle, at the original site of the tick bite. The rash typically expands in size to cover a large area (usually greater than two inches) over a period of days or weeks, or may even appear in several places on other parts of the body. Most people infected with Lyme disease will develop the EM rash, but not everyone develops the skin rash.

It’s important to consult a physician immediately if you have been bitten by a deer tick and develop symptoms such as fever, headache, chills, pain in the muscles or joints, enlarged lymph nodes, or facial paralysis. Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics and is treated more easily when detected early.

“Ticks actually have to bite you and remain attached for at least 24 hours to transmit Lyme disease. If you find a tick, remove it slowly and gently by using a pair of thin-bladed tweezers. Avoid folk remedies like petroleum jelly, nail polish remover or burning matches – these are not safe or effective ways to remove ticks,” Foldy said.

People can take steps to avoid tick bites and reduce the chance of getting Lyme disease:

- Avoid wooded and bushy areas with high grass and lots of leaf litter since ticks prefer these areas. If you do go into areas like this, try to stay in the center of a cleared trail to avoid contact with overgrown grass and brush.
- Use effective tick repellants and apply according to the label instructions. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults use repellants with 20-30% DEET on exposed skin and clothing to prevent tick bites. Repellants that contain permethrin can also be applied to clothing.
- Wear clothes that will help shield you from ticks. Long-sleeved shirts and long pants are best. Tuck your pants into the top of your socks or boots, to create a “tick barrier.” Light-colored clothing will make any ticks easier to spot.

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- Landscape homes and recreational areas to reduce the number of ticks and create tick-safe zones by using woodchips or gravel along the border between lawn and wooded area. It is also important to continue to remove leaf litter and clear tall grass and brush around the houses throughout the summer.
- Protect your pets from tick bites by checking your dog or cat for ticks before allowing them inside. While there is a vaccine available for pets to prevent Lyme disease, it will not stop the animal from bringing ticks into the home. Speak to your veterinarian about topical tick repellent available for pets.

In 2008, Wisconsin had 1,487 confirmed cases of Lyme disease in comparison to an annual average of 1,348 during the previous five years. Most Lyme disease infections occurred in the northwestern and west central regions of the state. However, there have been recent increases in reported Lyme cases from the eastern regions as well.

For more information, go to <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/TickBorne/LymeDisease/index.htm>

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