



NEWS RELEASE

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH URGES RESIDENTS TO BEWARE OF TICKS THAT MAY CARRY LYME DISEASE AND OTHER TICKBORNE DISEASES

[Greenwich, CT] - Lyme disease has been a public health issue in Connecticut since 1975. In fact, infected ticks transmit disease 12 months of the year in every U.S. state. While most human cases of Lyme disease are the result of the bites of tiny, infected immature ticks called “nymphs”, which feed during the spring and early summer months, the adult blacklegged tick known as a “deer tick” or *Ixodes scapularis*, is most active from late October through May. Therefore, it’s time to think about protecting yourself from tick bites.

Along with many other tick-associated diseases such as human ehrlichiosis and human babesiosis, Lyme disease can be readily acquired in any Connecticut town, particularly in areas that are wooded. In 2016, the State of Connecticut ranked fifth among states reporting Lyme disease with total 1,752 cases (confirmed and probable). That year, New Haven County was reported to have the highest incidence rate of disease followed by Fairfield County. In 2016, the Greenwich Department of Health Laboratory tested 405 ticks and about 27% of them were positive for the Lyme disease bacterium. About 2% were positive for organism that causes Babesiosis. Overall, examining infection rates by the life stage of the tick in this year, it was observed that 25% of the adult ticks and 12% of the nymph ticks (active May-July) were positive for Lyme bacterium.

“The spring is important for awareness about Lyme disease since everyone is planting, raking leaves and/or taking part in some kind of outdoor activity”, stated Caroline Calderone Baisley, Director of Health. “By applying a few simple precautionary measures like checking for ticks on the body every day, avoiding tick-prone areas such as leaf litter and vegetation, and using insect repellent, everyone can still enjoy being outdoors. These measures will decrease the chance of being infected. It is also important to remember that pets

can carry ticks into the home, so checking pets for ticks will greatly reduce the risk of ticks being carried indoors. Pet owners should talk to their veterinarians about using a topical tick prevention product on their pet all year long”.

It is also important to take note of other tick-borne diseases such as Babesiosis. The State of Connecticut reported 306 cases of Babesiosis in 2015. This number is a significant increase from the year before.

In an effort to raise awareness of this important health problem, the Greenwich Department of Health Laboratory will continue to provide public health literature and offer testing of ticks for the bacterium that causes Lyme disease and the protozoan organism that causes Babesiosis. “Although a tick may test positive, it does not necessarily mean that you will get Lyme disease,” stated Lab Director Doug Serafin. “Like any other screening tool, the process for testing ticks has a small margin of error and, specifically for these diseases, the tick must be attached for a period of time in order to increase a person’s risk. An engorged positive tick is much more likely to pass on the pathogen agent than those ticks that are not engorged. Tick testing is only one tool among many to assess a person’s risk of getting Lyme disease or other tickborne diseases.”

If a tick is found on a person – either dead or alive – it should be removed carefully with a long nosed tweezers. The tick should be placed in a tightly sealed small plastic sandwich bag marked with the date and body site of the bite. The cost of tick testing is \$65.00, which includes identifying the bacterium that causes Lyme disease and the protozoan organism that causes Babesiosis. Results are normally available within 7-10 days. For additional information on Lyme disease and other tickborne diseases, visit the Department of Health’s webpage at www.greenwichct.org and click “Brochures & Print Material” for the Ticks and Lyme disease link or visit the State of Connecticut, Department of Public Health website at www.ct.gov/dph/ticks. The Greenwich Department of Health Lab can be reached at 203-622-7843 for more information.