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Mosquito and Tick Season Has Arrived:

Yard Clean-Up and Personal Precautions Reduce Chance of Getting Sick

BREWSTER, NY—With mild weather arriving, tick numbers are increasing and mosquitos will be breeding—both will be looking for warm-blooded human hosts to bite. Lyme disease, ehrlichiosis, babesiosis and other tick-borne illnesses, along with a growing group of mosquito-carried diseases—West Nile, chikungunya, and now Zika virus—are all looming possibilities, however remote they may be.

“With our relatively mild winter, we are already seeing more ticks this season,” says Michael Nesheiwat, M.D., Interim Commissioner of Health for Putnam County. “Taking measures to reduce the tick and insect populations and the frequency of their bites remains the number-one defense against all the illnesses they carry.”

Lyme disease is the most common tick-borne illness found in our area, but not the only one. Cases of babesiosis, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis and powassan virus have been on the rise over the past few years. In the springtime, when the population of newborn nymph ticks increases, it is especially important to take precautions because their tiny size makes them more difficult to spot.

West Nile Virus has been the biggest mosquito-borne concern, but no cases have been confirmed in the county since 2011, and only three cases of chikungunya have occurred, all since 2014.

Preventing bites of all kinds should be a top defense. Personal protection measures should be taken for any outdoor activities. Shoes, socks, long pants and long-sleeved shirts should be worn whenever possible. Insect repellent containing DEET should also be used as well, paying close attention to the

directions provided by the manufacturer. Children should not apply this product themselves—it should be applied for them.

Putnam residents are also strongly advised to remove all standing water. Rain storms often result in pooling water. Anything in the yard that collects water can become a breeding site for mosquitos if left for more than four days. Some mosquitoes, including the *A. Albopictus*, even prefer small items like a bottle cap, full of water, in which to breed. Only one lone specimen of *A. Albopictus* has ever been found in Putnam, and while it has shown capable of carrying the Zika virus in a lab, it has not yet been seen as a reliable carrier in the real world.

“Checking your yard now and after every rainfall is crucial,” says Robert Morris, PE, MPH, Director of Environmental Health at the Putnam County Department of Health. “Anything that traps water—old tires, rain gutters, cups or cans, even leaves and tree holes—may provide a breeding spot. Drill holes in tires or dispose of them properly; clean gutters, and overturn all containers, however small.” Contrary to popular belief, smaller pools of water are more productive for mosquito breeding than larger bodies of water, which have natural mosquito predators such as fish and dragonflies. The PCDOH continues to apply larvicide to targeted road catch basins around the county to reduce breeding locales. This season mosquito tracking by the PCDOH and the New York State Department of Health will be increased as well.

The Health Department’s mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.com/health; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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