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WARM WEATHER INCREASES POSSIBILITY OF TICK-BORNE ILLNESSES

Brewster, NY—Warm weather brings more people outside and as a result exposure to ticks, and the diseases they carry, increases. Detection of a new tick-borne infection, recently found in blood samples from people who had been participating in Lyme disease research, underscores the continuing importance of focusing on prevention. It is caused by *Borrelia miyamotoi*, a genetically similar bacterium to *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which causes Lyme disease, and as a result the advised treatment is the same.

“We can’t test a patient for this infection yet,” explains Allen Beals, MD, JD, “since no commercially available test exists for doctors or labs to perform. The research is still new and limited. The good news is that as with Lyme disease, hopefully tick-borne illnesses can be prevented by carefully following the proper precautions and avoiding a tick bite in the first place.”

Gardeners, campers, hikers, outdoor workers and others who frequent wooded and tall, grassy areas are more likely to be exposed to ticks. These pesky, spider-like creatures cannot fly or jump, but instead rest on low-lying vegetation and attach to passing animals and people. The risk is greatest along trails in the woods and on the edges of properties with tall vegetation, where the higher humidity levels are ideal for tick survival. However, ticks are also carried into lawns and gardens by pets, mice and other small animals.

Decrease your chances of a tick bite by taking the following precautions:

- Tuck pants into socks and shirt into pants when in wooded and grassy areas.
- Wear light-colored clothing to spot ticks more easily.
- Check for ticks on clothing or skin frequently. Every two or three hours while outdoors is recommended. Brush them off before they can attach to your skin.

- 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 and follow all label directions. Bathe or shower and change clothes when you go back inside.
- Do not apply repellents directly to children. Apply to your hands and then transfer it to the child. Never apply repellents to children’s hands or face.
- No one should apply repellents near eyes, nose or mouth.

If an attached tick is found, remove it immediately. The Health Department recommends the following method, as other ways can increase the likelihood of passing bacteria into the individual: (1) Use fine-tipped tweezers to carefully grasp the mouth-parts—not the body—of the tick close to the skin. (2) Gently and steadily pull the tick out without twisting or squeezing. (3) Wash the bite area thoroughly. (4) Apply antiseptic. (5) Mark the date on your calendar, and if symptoms appear call your doctor to discuss treatment options. Symptoms generally appear within 30 days of exposure and may include fatigue, chills and fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, swollen lymph nodes, and/or a “bull’s eye” red rash at the bite site.

Lyme disease can be difficult to diagnose, because symptoms mimic those of many other diseases. Left untreated, it can produce severe arthritis, or cause neurological or cardiac problems. However, with early detection and antibiotic treatment, recovery from Lyme disease is usually rapid and complete. The Health Department also investigates several other tick-borne diseases, including anaplasmosis, babesiosis, and ehrlichiosis. The number of cases of these diseases are far less than Lyme disease, but have been rising in Putnam County. For more information about Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases, call the Putnam County Department of Health at (845) 808-1390 or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.health.state.ny.us.

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

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