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PCDOH WARNS: TICK SEASON APPROACHES

Brewster, NY—Warm weather brings people outside where they are exposed to tiny ticks carrying much more than Lyme disease. Cases of babesiosis, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis and powassan virus are still relatively small overall, but from 2012 to 2013, the total number rose more than 60 percent. Lyme is still most prevalent, but these other serious illnesses are on the rise and should not be discounted.

“Preventing tick bites is the first step,” explains Allen Beals, MD, JD, Commissioner of Health for Putnam County. “If you are out in wooded areas, or even tall grass, you must take precautions to avoid being bitten.” This means long sleeves and pants, tucked in socks, and the use of repellents containing DEET, following the label instructions. “Wear light-colored clothing to make ‘tick checks’ easier,” he continues, “and look for them at least every two or three hours while outdoors, so they can be brushed off before attaching.” Dr. Beals further advises that, once inside at the end of the day, do a thorough check of your whole body, giving special attention to your scalp, back, armpits, behind ears and the back of knees. “Remember, for transmission of Lyme disease the tick has to be attached for a number of hours, so checking at the end of the day is usually adequate,” he says.

In springtime, the population of tick nymphs increases. These young ticks are responsible for most of the infections because they are more difficult to spot because of their small size. Gardeners, campers, hikers, and outdoor workers are more likely to be exposed. They 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. Ticks are also carried into lawns and gardens by pets, mice and other small animals. Pets can additionally bring them into homes.

Attached ticks should be removed immediately to limit the chance of infection. Here’s how:

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, and mark the date on your calendar.

Symptoms of Lyme disease generally appear within 30 days of exposure, and may include fatigue, chills and fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, and swollen lymph nodes. For Lyme disease, a “bull’s eye” red rash may also appear at the bite site, often earlier than the other symptoms.

All tick-borne illnesses can be difficult to diagnose. Symptoms may mimic those of many other diseases. Left untreated, serious complications can occur, including severe arthritis, neurological and cardiac problems. With early detection and antibiotic treatment for the bacterial infections (Lyme, anaplasmosis and ehrlichiosis), recovery is usually rapid and complete. 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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