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LYME DISEASE AWARENESS MONTH

Brewster – Spring is here, which means it’s time for New Yorkers to take precautions to protect themselves from Lyme disease. Lyme disease is spread by the bite of infected deer ticks. Ticks cannot fly or jump. They like to rest on low-lying vegetation and attach to a passing animal or person.

Campers, hikers, outdoor workers and others who frequent wooded and tall grassy areas will more likely be exposed to ticks. The risk of exposure to ticks is greatest along trails in the woods and on the edges of properties with tall vegetation, but ticks may also be carried into lawns and gardens by pets and other animals.

Early stages of Lyme disease are usually marked by one or more of the following symptoms and signs: fatigue, chills and fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, swollen lymph nodes, and/or a “bull’s eye” red rash appearing on the skin at the site of the bite. These symptoms generally appear within 30 days of exposure.

Lyme disease is often difficult to diagnose, because its symptoms mimic those of many other diseases. Left untreated, Lyme disease 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.

You can decrease your chances of being bitten by a tick by taking the following precautions:

- When in wooded and grassy areas which are likely to be tick-infested, wear light-colored clothing (to spot ticks). Tuck pants into socks and shirt into pants.
- Every two or three hours while outdoors, check for ticks on clothing or skin. Brush off any ticks on clothing 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 following label directions. Bathe or shower and change clothes when you go back inside.
- Children may be at greater risk for reactions to repellents, in part because their exposure may be greater. Do not apply repellents directly to children. Apply to your own hands and then put it on the child, or spray clothing before getting dressed. Never apply to the hands or face of small children.
- No one should apply repellents near eyes, nose or mouth. Also, use it sparingly around the ears.

If any ticks are found, they should be removed immediately. There is only one recommended way to remove ticks. Use fine-tipped tweezers to carefully grasp the mouth-parts (not the body) of the tick close to the skin, and then gently and steadily pull the tick out without twisting or squeezing. Any other method will actually increase the likelihood that the tick will pass bacteria into the individual. Do not apply any antiseptic or other substance to the tick prior to removal.

After removing the tick, wash the bite area thoroughly, and apply antiseptic. Mark the date on your calendar, and if symptoms appear call your doctor to discuss treatment options.

For more information about Lyme disease, call the Putnam County Department of Health at (845) 278-6558 or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.health.state.ny.us.

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