

# NEWS RELEASE



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## **HEALTH DEPT. OFFERS TIPS ON HOW TO AVOID TICKS AND LYME DISEASE**

*Twenty to Thirty County Residents Diagnosed with Illness Every Year*

The Allegheny County Health Department is offering residents information and advice on how to cut the risk of Lyme disease, which can be contracted in remote wooded areas as well as in their own yards and neighborhoods.

Lyme disease, which is transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected tick, is diagnosed in 20 to 30 County residents every year. These infections may be acquired not only on trips but also increasingly so in local areas, because the tick that transmits Lyme disease, *Ixodes scapularis*, also known as the deer tick, is now the most commonly found tick on people and pets in the County.

If caught early, Lyme disease can almost always be successfully treated with antibiotics. When it goes undiagnosed and untreated, serious complications may develop such as chronic arthritis and damage to the heart and nervous system.

Some people remain untreated because early symptoms are usually mild and flu-like and don't always include a telltale "bull's-eye rash" that can appear anywhere on the body and not necessarily at the site of the tick bite.

Health officials urge these precautions to protect yourself and family:

- Avoid places where ticks are likely to be present – wooded and bushy areas with high grass and a lot of leaf litter – especially from late May through August when most tick bites tend to occur.
- Stay in open spaces or on trails when walking in the woods to avoid contact with overgrown grass, brush and leaf litter. Ticks can't jump or fly and one must come into actual contact with you in order to attach itself and bite you.
- Wear long pants, long sleeves and long socks to keep ticks off your skin. Tuck pant legs into socks or boots and shirts into pants to keep ticks on the outside of your clothing. Wear light-colored garments to spot ticks more easily.

- Use insect-repellent with 20% to 30% DEET on bare skin. Follow instructions carefully, especially with children. For added protection, spray a second repellent containing Permethrin on shoes and clothing. Don't use Permethrin on bare skin, but it can be applied to pet hair.
- Remove ticks from your clothing before going indoors. To kill any you may have missed, wash your clothes in hot water and dry them on high heat for at least an hour.
- Check your skin for ticks after being outdoors, even in your own yard. Inspect all parts of your body carefully and remove ticks immediately using a fine-tipped tweezers. If you remove a tick within 24 hours, your chance of getting Lyme disease is extremely small.
- Monitor your health closely after a tick bite and be alert for any signs or symptoms of Lyme disease.
- Keep the yard around your house clean and free of leaf litter, tall grass, brush and other things that may attract ticks or birds, deer, mice, chipmunks and other small mammals that serve as their hosts.
- Examine household pets for ticks after they go outside because a loose tick can easily brush off your pet and attach itself to you.
- Consider using insecticides to control ticks on your property. Two applications a year can significantly reduce the tick population. Follow the label instructions carefully.

For additional information about tick control and Lyme disease prevention, please call the Allegheny County Health Department at **412-687-ACHD**.