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Handling an Uptick in Lyme Disease

BY PAMELA BRILL



Summertime and the living may be easy, but not when it comes to Lyme disease.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 43,000 cases were reported in 2017 – a 17-percent increase over the previous year – with New York listed as one of the higher incidence areas. To protect your family and pets against Lyme disease, consider these expert tips for a safer outdoor season.

Cover up to minimize exposure. If you'll be spending time in the yard, park or other grassy areas where deer ticks tend to harbor, shield as much of your skin from the elements as possible. "Wear long pants with the cuffs tucked into socks to prevent the ticks access to your legs," says Dr. Bruce Hirsch, attending physician, infectious diseases with Northwell Health. Use DEET repellent on the skin and spray clothing with Permethrin for all-over coverage.

Check it out. As soon as you're back inside, do a tick check to look for poppy seed-sized, red or black critters that may have affixed themselves to the skin. For a thorough inspection, shower at night and treat clothing that may have come into close contact. "Ten minutes in the dryer will kill all ticks that may be on clothing," says Dr. Theresa Fiorito, an infectious disease specialist at NYU Winthrop.

Be wary that time spent outdoors isn't the only way to be exposed to ticks. "One of the questions we ask patients is 'Do you have any dogs or cats that sleep in your bed?'"

she says. Since pets can transmit Lyme-carrying ticks, monthly tick/flea treatments are recommended.

Getting rid of it. If you find a tick on a family member, pet or yourself, do not handle it with your fingers. Instead, use tweezers to extract the tick and place it in a sealed bag or container. Is it necessary to bring the captured critter to your doctor? Fiorito says the only purpose is to confirm if it's the type of tick (Ixodes) that carries Lyme disease. "Testing the tick for infection has poor predictive value and is not recommended," she says.

You were bitten...now what? The characteristic bull's eye-shaped rash that continues to expand is the tip-off for early Lyme disease detection. Other symptoms associated with tick bites include headache, fever and tiredness. More severe cases may include facial muscle paralysis, joint pains and intermittent arthritis.

However, if the tick is not engorged in the skin, contracting Lyme disease is considered low risk. For ticks that have been attached for more than 36 hours, doctors may administer a single dose of doxycycline to prevent infection, which can start within 72 hours of tick removal.

Safer surroundings. You may be reluctant to head back outdoors after encountering a tick, but outfitting your property can help reduce tick exposure. Hirsch recommends installing barriers to exclude deer, as well as landscaping that incorporates short grass or pavers next to tick-infested areas.



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