

Ebel: Warming weather increases tick activity

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(Photo: Submitted photo)

The number of Lyme Disease cases in Ohio has dramatically risen over the past 15 years.

It was not long ago that when an Ohioan was diagnosed with Lyme disease, the automatic assumption was that they had traveled to the east coast states where they got infected. That is no longer the case. In fact, most of Ohio's counties have reported human Lyme Disease cases over the past 10 years. In 2017, the Licking County Health Department reported 20 cases of local residents diagnosed with Lyme Disease, with the majority of the cases diagnosed in June and July.

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is transmitted to humans through the bite of infected blacklegged ticks. Typical symptoms include fever, headache, fatigue, and a characteristic "bull's-eye" skin rash. Most cases of Lyme disease can be treated successfully with a few weeks of antibiotics. If left untreated, the infection can spread to joints, the heart, and the nervous system. Other common diseases carried by ticks in Ohio include Anaplasmosis, Babesiosis, Ehrlichiosis, and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

Blacklegged ticks are active in Ohio throughout the year, which makes year-round prevention important. CDC prevention tips include the following:

- Avoid ticks by walking in the center of trails and avoiding wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter.
- Repel ticks on skin and clothing by using repellent that contains 20 percent or more DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 on exposed skin for protection that lasts several hours, always follow product instructions. Parents should apply this product to their children, avoiding hands, eyes, and mouth.
- Use products that contain permethrin on clothing. Treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants, socks and tents with products containing 0.5% permethrin. It remains protective through several washings.
- Find and remove ticks from your body by bathing or showering as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within 2 hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you. Conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of your body upon return from tick-infested areas. Parents should check their children for ticks under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, behind the knees, between the legs, around the waist, and especially in their hair. Examine gear and pets.
- Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, then attach to a person later, so carefully examine pets, coats, and day packs. Tumble dry clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors.

The health benefits of being active and enjoying the outdoors outweigh the risks of being exposed to ticks, especially, if you practice the recommended prevention strategies. So enjoy every chance you can to explore our parks and trails after the long cold winter.

Ebel is Licking County Health Commissioner

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