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Tick Wise Lyme Disease in Maine

Health care providers in Maine reported 1,508 cases of Lyme disease in 2021 (as of March 25, 2022). Maine CDC also reported record numbers of anaplasmosis and babesiosis in 2021 and tied the record number of Powassan virus disease cases statewide.

Though ticks can be active at any temperature above freezing, most tick activity occurs in the warmer months. May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month in Maine, and Maine CDC asks health care providers to stress the importance of tick education in the prevention of tickborne disease. The 2022 Lyme Disease Awareness Month theme, “Tick Wise,” reminds us to prioritize tick bite prevention. This includes:

- 1) Knowing tick habitat and using caution in areas where ticks may live.
- 2) Wearing light-colored clothing that covers arms and legs.
- 3) Using EPA-approved repellents such as: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- 4) Performing daily tick checks on ourselves, all family members, and any pets and showering after being in tick habitat.

Important Reminders

- Tickborne diseases are preventable by avoiding contact with infected ticks.
- An infected deer tick (*Ixodes scapularis*) must be attached for 24-48 hours in order to transmit the bacterium that causes Lyme disease (*Borrelia burgdorferi*).
- Early symptoms of Lyme disease and other tickborne diseases are non-specific and similar to symptoms of COVID-19. These include fatigue, fever, headaches, myalgia, and arthralgia. Make sure to ask about a history of tick bites or time spent in tick habitat when patients exhibit these symptoms.
- The most common early symptom of Lyme disease is an *erythema migrans* (EM; “bull’s-eye” rash) appearing 3-30 days after transmission (in about 50% of cases in Maine).
- Disseminated symptoms of Lyme disease include: arthritis (including joint swelling), Bell’s palsy and other cranial neuritis, encephalitis, lymphocytic meningitis, radiculoneuropathy, and second- or third-degree atrioventricular block.
- Antibiotic therapy is effective for the treatment of Lyme disease. Clinical treatment guidelines are available at the Infectious Diseases Society of America’s (IDSA) website.

Effective January 2, 2022, the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) modified the Lyme disease surveillance case definition. Under the previous surveillance definition, providers reported all diagnosed *erythema migrans* rashes and all positive lab diagnoses and

Maine CDC followed up with health care providers for clinical information. As a result of this change, **Maine CDC will no longer collect reports of *erythema migrans* rashes or clinical information from health care providers.** Starting in 2022, Maine CDC will no longer report confirmed cases of Lyme disease; only probable cases will be reported. This is a change in surveillance case definition only and **DOES NOT** reflect a change in Lyme disease diagnosis or treatment recommendations.

Lyme disease is not the only disease that can result from a deer tick bite. Anaplasmosis, babesiosis, *Borrelia miyamotoi* disease, and Powassan virus disease are other tickborne infections found in Maine. In 2021, health care providers reported 841 cases of human anaplasmosis, 201 cases of human babesiosis cases, nine human cases of *Borrelia miyamotoi* disease, and three cases of Powassan virus disease (preliminary data as of April 6, 2022). The majority of tickborne illnesses occur during the summer and fall months when ticks and humans are active outdoors.

Thank you for your invaluable help in the prevention and early identification of tickborne diseases here in Maine.

Resources:

- IDSA treatment guidelines, including Lyme disease, available at www.idsociety.org/practice-guideline/alphabetical-guidelines/
- University of Maine Cooperative Extension Tick ID Lab submission instructions found at www.ticks.umaine.edu
- For additional questions, please call Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821 or email disease.reporting@maine.gov
- Human Lyme disease data available through the Maine Tracking Network at <http://www.maine.gov/lyme> under “Maine Tracking Network: Tickborne Diseases” on the left-hand side of the page