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Tick Wise Lyme Disease in Maine

As the weather warms, ticks are already active. Lyme disease remains the most common vectorborne disease in Maine, with health care providers reporting 1,508 human Lyme disease cases 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 in Maine. Clearly, tickborne diseases remain a threat to humans and animals in Maine.

Tick-bite prevention remains the most important method for prevention of tickborne disease for both humans and pets, and you play an important role in educating pet owners. This year's Lyme Disease Awareness Month theme is "Tick Wise." This reminds us all to practice tick bite prevention regularly, both for ourselves and our four-legged friends. Please help pet owners be "Tick Wise" and prevent tickborne diseases by reminding them to:

- 1) Know tick habitat and use caution in areas where ticks may live.
- 2) Wear light-colored clothing that covers arms and legs.
- 3) Use EPA-approved repellent such as: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and oil of lemon eucalyptus on themselves and family members.
- 4) Perform daily tick checks after being outdoors on themselves and any pets. Showering after exposure to tick habitat may help wash off any unattached ticks.
- 5) Use acaricide on pets to help reduce the number of ticks that are brought into the home and protect pets from tickborne disease transmission.

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*). Therefore, it is vital to stress prompt, proper, and careful removal of attached ticks from both humans and pets. While there is a vaccine available to prevent Lyme disease in dogs, a human vaccine is not yet available. However, Lyme disease is treatable in humans and animals with appropriate antibiotic treatment.

Lyme disease is not the only disease that can be carried by deer ticks in Maine. Anaplasmosis, babesiosis, *Borrelia miyamotoi* disease, and Powassan virus disease are other tickborne diseases found in Maine. Providers reported human cases of all four diseases in 2021, and all remain a public health concern.

While the deer tick is the only species of tick in Maine that can pass the bacterium that causes Lyme disease, there are several other species of ticks found across the state. Tick identification is important and there are tick identification resources available to order at Maine CDC's website. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension Tick ID Lab also offers identification and testing services as well as educational references.

Thank you for your invaluable help in preventing Lyme disease here in Maine.

Resources:

- Lyme disease information available at www.maine.gov/lyme
- UMaine Extension Tick ID Lab: www.ticks.umaine.edu
- Tick identification resources and other materials available to order at www.maine.gov/dhhs/order
- Human Lyme disease data available through the Maine Tracking Network at www.maine.gov/lyme under “Maine Tracking Network: Tickborne Diseases” on the left-hand side of the page
- For additional questions, please call Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821 or email disease.reporting@maine.gov
- Tickborne videos found at www.maine.gov/idepi under “Videos” on the left-hand side of the page