

# Lyme Disease Awareness

**NJLINCS Health Alert Network - Public Health Info**  
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We are all familiar with the impact of ticks and tick-borne diseases here in Ocean County. Lyme disease in particular, poses a serious public health issue and is the most prevalent vector born disease in the continental United States. Scientists are predicting that 2017 is going to be a banner year for ticks. More infected ticks raise the potential for increased tick-borne disease infections. Prevention is our best tool to combat tick-borne disease infections like Lyme disease.

The warmer months are upon us. Please take a moment to review the below information regarding Lyme and tick-borne diseases – especially the prevention information. Spread the word and stay safe!

## **Background**

Tick-borne diseases are an increasingly pressing public health issue in the United States. In 2014, 94% of all vector born diseases reported in the US were tick-borne diseases. Furthermore, infections from tick-borne diseases in the US are steadily increasing as the geographic ranges of ticks expand.<sup>[1]</sup> New York and New Jersey carry a significant burden of tick-borne illnesses, especially Lyme disease.

## **2017 Outlook**

Scientists are predicting an uptick in tick-borne diseases in 2017. A bumper crop of acorns from 2015 has driven an increase in mice populations (who feed on acorns) in 2016. More mice on the move in 2016 means more infected ticks transmitting diseases, such as Lyme disease. In the northeast, white-footed mouse numbers are of particular concern. These mice play a major role in infecting blacklegged ticks with the agents that cause Lyme disease, Babesiosis, and Anaplasmosis.<sup>[2]</sup>

## **Lyme Disease**

Lyme disease is the most common tick-borne disease in the United States. The CDC estimates that around 300,000 people are infected each year. Many of these individuals go undiagnosed.<sup>[3]</sup>

## **Prevention**

Reducing exposure to ticks is the best defense against Lyme disease and other tick-borne infections. Individuals should be extra vigilant in warmer months (April-September) when ticks are most active. You and your family can take several steps to prevent and control Lyme disease:

- 1) Reduce direct exposure to ticks by avoiding wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter.
- 2) Repel ticks on skin and clothing using a repellent that contains 20 percent or more DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 on exposed skin for protection that lasts several hours. Always follow product instructions.
- 3) Find and remove ticks from your body as soon as possible.

Dogs are also very susceptible to tick bites and tick-borne diseases. Vaccines are not available for all the tick-borne diseases that dogs can get, and they don't keep the dogs from bringing ticks into your home. For these reasons, it's important to use a tick preventive product on your dog. Furthermore, always check your pets for ticks daily, especially after they spend time outdoors.

Finally, you also may want to explore measures to help reduce tick populations in your yard. The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station has developed a comprehensive [Tick Management Handbook](#) to help create tick-safe zones around homes.

For more information on prevention measures visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/lyme/prev/>

## **Symptoms, Treatment and Care**

The most common symptoms of tick-related illnesses are fever/chills, headache, fatigue, and muscle aches, as well as rash. <sup>[4]</sup> Since the early signs and symptoms of tick-borne illnesses are nonspecific patients are often misdiagnosed. To increase the likelihood of an early, accurate diagnosis, health care providers should be familiar with risk factors, signs, and symptoms consistent with tick-borne diseases and their geographic distribution. To help health care providers, the CDC has created a reference manual on [Tick-borne Diseases of the United States](#).

[1] CDC Public Health Grand Rounds; [Emerging Tick-borne Diseases](#); March 2017

[1] <http://www.caryinstitute.org/newsroom/forbidding-forecast-lyme-disease-northeast>

[1] CDC; <https://www.cdc.gov/lyme/index.html>

[1] CDC; [Symptoms of Tick-borne Illness](#)

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[1] CDC Public Health Grand Rounds; [Emerging Tick-borne Diseases](#); March 2017

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[3] CDC; <https://www.cdc.gov/lyme/index.html>

[4] CDC; [Symptoms of Tick-borne Illness](#)