

TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Village * 100 Old Billerica Rd. Bedford, MA
August 2017

TICK TALK

By Susan Cusson, NP



With all the cold rainy weather we had this spring it seemed at times like summer just wasn't going to happen, but here it is in full bloom. With the warmer weather people get more active and so do deer ticks. Experts are predicting one of the worst years ever for ticks. While Lyme is the most prevalent disease transmitted by deer ticks, it's not the only one. A rare but potentially life threatening disease called Powassan virus is one of many other diseases transmitted by ticks. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 75 cases of Powassan have been reported in the northeast and Midwest over the past decade. By comparison, the number of cases of Lyme disease reported exceeds 250,000 in the same time frame and same region. Warmer winters have led to an increased tick population, so experts predict rising tick-borne infections of many types including Lyme and Powassan.

Since Lyme disease is so widespread in this area, it warrants the most attention. The incubation period for Lyme disease is 3 to 30 days after a bite from an infected tick. During the first few weeks of infection, blood tests are not sensitive and therefore not helpful in diagnosing Lyme disease. During this stage, treatment with antibiotics can be initiated solely on the clinical exam finding of erythema migrans (EM). EM occurs in 70–80% of patients with Lyme disease. EM rashes generally expand slowly over a few days after which they may develop a “bull’s-eye” appearance consisting of a red ring with central clearing.

If you ever notice a rash of this type, even if you haven't been aware of a tick bite, seek medical attention. Antibiotics will kill the Lyme disease bacteria in most cases, but you need to catch it early. If early localized Lyme disease isn't treated, the disease can spread throughout the body affecting the heart, brain and nervous system. Diagnosis and treatment of chronic Lyme disease is controversial. Some medical professionals don't recognize it as a real diagnosis. Folks who suffer from an array of chronic symptoms related to Lyme disease would argue otherwise. Consultation with an infectious disease specialist is recommended if chronic Lyme disease is suspected.

The very best way to avoid infection altogether is by knowing how to prevent tick bites. Apply insect repellent with DEET or picaridin to clothing and skin, wear light-colored clothing, ideally long pants tucked into socks. You can also treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants and socks with products containing permethrin. Follow product instructions carefully. It remains protective through several washings. Pre-treated clothing is available and may be protective longer. Most importantly, always check thoroughly for ticks after you spend time outdoors, ideally within two hours. To be safe

you can also tumble dry clothes on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors.

What's the best way to remove a tick if you do find one attached? An internet search will turn up plenty of suggestions, some you'll want to avoid. Do not apply cream, Vaseline, oil or a burnt match to the tick. These methods are ineffective.

Remove the tick by grasping it as close to the surface of the skin as possible using fine tipped tweezers. Avoid grabbing the tick by the body as you might inadvertently squeeze fluid that could be infected into your body. Pull upward with steady pressure. Don't twist or jerk the tick, this can cause the mouth-parts to break off and remain in the skin. If you are unable to remove the tick easily with clean tweezers, leave it alone and let the skin heal. Even better than tweezers are small plastic devices that easily remove ticks safely. They are inexpensive and can be found at pet stores and some hardware stores. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol or soap and water. Dispose of a live tick by submersing it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag/container, or flushing it down the toilet. Never crush a tick with your fingers.

If you've been bitten by a tick and are wondering if it's infected with Lyme or another disease, testing is possible at a cost, since insurance companies don't cover that service. Even if a tick tests positive, it doesn't necessarily mean the disease was transmitted to you. The Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA) does not generally recommend antimicrobial prophylaxis for prevention of Lyme disease after a recognized tick bite. However, in areas that are highly endemic for Lyme disease, a single dose of doxycycline may be offered in certain situations. This dose should be taken within 72 hours of tick removal after the tick was presumably attached for at least 36 hours.

Currently there are no vaccines available to prevent Lyme disease. Researchers at the University of Massachusetts Medical School are working on an antibody drug that would prevent people from contracting the tick-borne disease. For now, prevention is your best defense against contracting Lyme disease or other tick-borne illnesses. Take time to enjoy the great outdoors. Whenever possible, avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter, and walk in the center of trails. With a few precautions we can all enjoy the summer season safely and stay healthy.

Drink up!



As you know, staying hydrated is an important part of overall health. Dehydration can lead to serious consequences, in fact it's one of the ten most common reasons for hospitalization.

Why are older adults more susceptible to dehydration? The amount of body water an individual has decreases about 15% between the ages of 20 and 80. With this decrease, the body becomes more susceptible to dehydration from the loss of a small amount of body water. The sensation of thirst also diminishes with aging, leading to reduced fluid consumption. Warmer temperatures and the use of diuretics or laxatives might also contribute to dehydration.

How much is enough? Six 8 ounce glasses of fluid per day is the minimum recommendation. It's important to realize that some foods, as well as fluids are a good source of water. An orange, for instance, is 87% water! Good sources of water are fruits and vegetables, non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated beverages and of course, good old water!