News Release

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Cases of Lyme disease double; blacklegged tick the culprit

The blacklegged deer tick is definitely making its presence known this summer. According to the Knox County Health Department, that should be a concern for local residents. The blacklegged deer tick is the main carrier for Lyme disease. So far this year, there are currently19 cases of Lyme disease in Knox County. That's more than double the total number of cases for all of last year.

The blacklegged tick is one of two common ticks in Ohio. The other is the American dog tick which causes Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. So far this year in Knox County, there has been one confirmed case which has been the average number for the past few years.

Environmental Health Director Nate Overholt, RS, said anyone who spends time outside should take precautions to avoid contact with all ticks. "That includes wearing repellent and checking for ticks on your clothing and your skin, as well as your pets," said Overholt. One of the problems with detecting the blacklegged tick is the nymphs (young ticks) are no bigger than a poppy seed which makes them nearly impossible to spot.

Ticks live in grassy areas and attach themselves to you or your clothing when you walk by. When attached to the clothing, the ticks then search for an opening where they can attach to your skin.

"Not all ticks are infected with disease, but those that are, must bite and remain attached for hours in order to transmit diseases," said Overholt. For the black-legged tick, it's usually 36-48 hours; for the dog tick, it's four to six hours.

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The health department will identify ticks if they are brought in alive and in an enclosed container, said Overholt. While identification does not confirm that a tick is infected with a disease, identification can alert the person to disease symptoms and what to do if the symptoms occur. Confirmation testing by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is no longer available.

"If you develop symptoms including fever, flu-like illness or a rash within a few weeks of a tick bite, you should tell you doctor about your tick exposure, said Overholt. He recommends people record the date of any tick bites in case symptoms occur later. Some symptoms of Lyme disease may not appear until weeks, months or years after a tick bite, affecting joints, nervous system and heart. "Prompt removal of an attached tick will significantly reduce the risk of infection," said Overholt.

Diagnosis of Lyme disease is based on history of tick exposure, signs and symptoms and is aided by the use of blood tests. Lyme disease responds to appropriate antibiotic therapy. Early detection and treatment will reduce the risk of arthritis and other complications.

Many areas in Ohio have seen an increase in Lyme disease this year including neighboring Licking County where there are currently 44 cases and Coshocton County where there are 22 cases. Statewide, there have been 155 confirmed cases of Lyme disease.

Humans are not the only ones affected by the bite of a tick, dogs and horses can also be affected. Symptoms of Lyme disease in dogs include joint pain, fever, and kidney dysfunction; yet some dogs can be asymptomatic. Horses can have variable signs when infected with Lyme disease including neurologic and orthopedic changes, as well as uveitis (inflammation in the eye). Cats are not affected by Lyme disease.

Dogs can be protected from Lyme disease through vaccination that is boosted yearly, and by using year-round tick prevention. Topical preventions can also be used on horses, but there is currently no labeled vaccine for horses.

"It's important that when looking for ticks on your pets that you not only look for those that are attached, but also for ones that are crawling in the fur," said Overholt. "Because if they are not killed, they may find themselves to you and your family."

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