

Avoiding ticks the key to avoiding Lyme disease

Oquawka – May is finally here, bringing with it blooming flowers, budding trees, warm breezes, sunny skies – and ticks. Those nasty little bloodsucking arachnids are back, carrying with them the threat of Lyme disease, an illness characterized by high fever, headaches, fatigue and skin rash.

May is also Lyme Disease Awareness Month, and Eagle View Community Health System encourages western Illinois residents to educate themselves about the disease, its symptoms and ways to avoid being bitten by ticks, the carriers of the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which causes Lyme disease.

“The good news is a few preventative measures can drastically reduce your chances of contracting Lyme disease,” said Dr. Jonathan Lindo, MD. “There is no need to avoid being outside this spring if you’re willing to be proactive in avoiding tick bites.”

Blacklegged ticks (also known as deer ticks), the main carriers of Lyme disease, are especially active in May, June and July, so these are the months to be especially vigilant. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, cdc.gov, offers a few simple suggestions on how to avoid being bitten.

- Avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and lots of leaf litter, as these are tick’s favorite hangouts.
- When in the woods, stay on the center of walking trails to avoid unnecessary contact with overgrown grass, brush, and leaf litter.
- Wear long pants, long socks, and long-sleeved shirts, and tuck pants into socks or boots and shirttails into pants. This will keep ticks from making it onto the skin.
- Wear light-colored clothing, as it makes ticks easier to spot.
- Use insect repellent with 20-30 percent DEET on exposed skin and clothing to prevent tick bites, or use Permethrin, which kills ticks on contact. (Do not apply Permethrin to the skin, however.)
- Perform daily tick checks after being outdoors. Inspect all parts of the body carefully, including armpits, the scalp, and groin. Remove ticks immediately using fine-tipped tweezers.
- Wash clothing in hot water and dry using high heat for at least one hour to kill any ticks that were overlooked.

Regular tick checks are especially important because the chances of contracting Lyme disease are greatly reduced if ticks are attached less than 24 hours. The CDC recommends monitoring your health closely if a tick bite does occur.

Early symptoms of Lyme disease include a red or “bull's-eye” rash (usually radiating from the bite), fever, fatigue, muscle and joint aches and pains, and chills. Left untreated, Lyme disease eventually can cause infection in the joints, heart and the nervous system.

Call Eagle View's Oquawka center at 309-867-2202 or the Stronghurst center at 309-924-1381 to schedule an appointment if you are showing any of these symptoms. Patients diagnosed in the early stages of Lyme disease are typically given a few weeks' regimen of oral antibiotics, and usually recover rapidly. Treatment becomes more difficult if the disease is allowed to progress.