

**To:** Children and Parents of School Children

**From:** The Dutchess County Department of Health, 387-391 Main Mall, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

**Subject:** Preventing Lyme Disease

**Why Do Ticks Bite?** Ticks are spider-like creatures that need a blood meal to survive. When a tick bites an animal (called a "host") it can remain attached for several days.

**Why Is It Important To Prevent Tick Bites?** Ticks are capable of transmitting diseases to animals and humans if they are infected with a disease. The most common tick-borne illness in southern New York State, and elsewhere, is Lyme Disease.

**What Is Lyme Disease?** Lyme Disease is caused by a bacteria called a spirochete transmitted by the deer tick. Early symptoms of the illness include: flu-like symptoms; an expanding, circular rash; fatigue; and body aches. If untreated, cardiac, neurologic problems, and even chronic arthritis may develop.

**What Do Deer Ticks Look Like?** Nymphal deer ticks are black, and the size of a poppy seed. Adult females are black and red-orange, and the size of an apple seed. Males are all black and smaller. Ticks that are filled with blood ("engorged") can be many times larger.

**Where And When Are Deer Ticks Found?** Deer ticks are found in woodland areas. They can also be found in grassy or brush habitats, including lawns and parks. **Ticks are most active during June and July**, when most cases have symptom onset. Not all deer ticks are infected, but rates can reach fifty percent.

**Who Is At Risk Of Being Bitten By Deer Ticks?** Anyone who lives or works near wooded or grassy areas in the Hudson Valley is at risk. Activities such as hiking, gardening, and hunting, (as well as some occupations), may also expose you to tick bites.

**What Do I Do If I Find An Attached Tick?** When a tick bites, only the mouthparts are inserted into the skin; it is not likely that you will feel the bite. If you find an attached tick, **do not squeeze the body or apply anything to the tick** to remove it. Grasp the mouthparts with fine-tipped tweezers as close to the skin as possible. Pull out steadily and firmly. Sometimes the tick will break upon removal, but it is not capable of transmitting disease. Remove the mouthparts as you would a splinter, and apply antiseptic. You may wish to save the tick in a small container for identification, and notify your physician.

**How Do I Prevent Tick Bites?** The best way to avoid tick bites, and prevent disease, is to avoid tick-infested areas. The following steps can be taken to prevent tick bites:

\* **Wear light-colored, tightly-woven clothing.** The light color will make it easier to see ant ticks.

\* **Tuck your pants into socks, and shirt into pants.** Ticks do not fly or jump. They cling to fallen leaves, grass, low plants, and brush. When a host passes, the tick grabs on. Ticks have a natural tendency to crawl upwards

\* **Use commercial insect repellents containing 20% to 30% DEET** as indicated on the product label. **Apply sparingly** to shoes, socks, and pants. **Do not apply to skin.** Check with your doctor if you experience a problem.

\* **Stay near the center of trails and roads** to avoid brush and grass.

\* **When outside, check yourself frequently** for crawling ticks. If you find one, remove it with your fingers or a pair of tweezers. Check creases in your clothing.

\* **Check yourself, children, and pets nightly** for attached ticks. **Removal of ticks is important.**

**What Should I Do If I Think I Have Lyme Disease?** The precautions mentioned above reduce, but do not eliminate, the chances of being bitten by ticks. If you develop symptoms, see your physician. Clinical examination, history of tick bite, and a blood test, make diagnosis possible. **Lyme Disease can be effectively treated with antibiotics, especially when detected early.**

**What Is My Local Health Department Doing About Lyme Disease?** Your local Health Department is taking an active role in educating the public about Lyme Disease prevention, and is continually monitoring local cases. Call your Health Department for the latest, scientific information regarding chemical control of ticks.

**If You Have Further Questions:** call the "Lyme Disease Hotline" at **914-431-1538**.