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Time to Watch Out for Ticks

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Contact: Leslie Piotrowski

(847) 377-8055

Carolyn Waller

(847) 377-8099

Time to Watch Out for Ticks, a Growing Concern in Lake County

The Lake County Health Department/Community Health Center is encouraging county residents to take precautions against ticks, which can carry diseases such as Lyme disease. Once considered a rare illness in Lake County, Lyme disease is becoming more common in the area. The average annual number of reported probable and confirmed cases of this disease increased steadily from 6.7 cases between 2003-2005 to 30.3 cases between 2012-2015.

"As people go outside to enjoy warmer weather they should remember to protect themselves and their families against ticks and Lyme disease," said Mike Adam, a senior biologist at the Health Department. "This is the peak time of year for tick activity."

Deer ticks (sometimes called the black-legged tick) can carry Lyme disease, as well as other diseases such as anaplasmosis, bartonella, ehrlichia or babesiosis. They are about an eighth of an inch long as adults, and dark brown to bright red with black legs. Deer ticks were first documented in Lake County in 2006. Another kind of local tick is the American dog tick (sometimes called the wood tick). Dog ticks are one-quarter-inch long as adults, much smaller as juveniles, and are dark reddish brown with irregular silvery or cream-colored patterns on their backs. Additionally, the Lone Star tick, distinguished by a white dot, or star on its back, was documented for the first time last year in Lake County. Neither Lone Star nor dog ticks transmit Lyme disease. However, the dog tick can transmit Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and the Lone Star tick can transmit STARI (Southern Tick-Associated Rash Illness), although no cases of these diseases have been reported in Lake County.

Each year, the Health Department conducts environmental surveillance of ticks. In conjunction with North Park University and the Lake County Forest Preserve District, it collects and tests samples for Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. To build awareness about the dangers associated with ticks, it is launching a "Fight the Bite" educational campaign that includes billboard advertisements.

The Health Department is urging residents to protect themselves from exposure to ticks by following the guidelines below:

Tips for reducing tick habitat around your home:

- Clear leaf litter under trees, and keep the ground clean under bird feeders.
- Keep grass near playground equipment short.
- Install a wood chip or gravel barrier between lawns and wooded and tall grass areas. Minimize wood piles as these are attractive to small mammals such as mice, which can carry ticks.

Tips for reducing exposure to ticks:

- Avoid tick habitat by staying on trails when in forest preserves and parks.
- Wear light-colored, protective clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts, long trousers, boots or sturdy shoes, and a head covering. Tuck trouser cuffs in socks and tuck in shirt tails.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET primarily to clothes. Apply repellent sparingly to exposed skin. Do not apply directly to the face. Be sure to wash treated skin after coming indoors. Use repellents containing permethrin to treat clothes (especially pants, socks and shoes), but not skin. Always follow label directions and supervise children in the use of repellents.
- Walk in the center of trails so plants do not brush against you.
- Check yourself, your children and other family members every two to three hours for ticks.
- If your pets spend time outdoors, regularly check them for ticks, too.
- Promptly remove any ticks to help prevent infection.

To find and remove ticks:

- Check the skin and clothing of anyone that has been in grassy areas for an extended period.
- Pay extra attention to the neck, behind the ears and the groin.
- Use fine-tipped tweezers or shield your fingers with a tissue when removing a tick.
- Do not burn the tick with a match or cover it with petroleum jelly.
- Grasp the tick close to the skin surface and pull upward with slow, even pressure.
- Do not twist or pull the tick quickly; this causes the mouthparts to break off and remain in

the skin.

- Do not squeeze the tick's body.
- Once the tick is removed, disinfect the bite site and wash your hands with soap and water.

Make a note of the date you removed the tick and save it for identification in case you become ill. Place the tick in a plastic bag and put it in your freezer.

In order to transmit illness, a deer tick must be attached to the skin for at least 24 hours. Symptoms of Lyme disease may include "bull's-eye" rashes or lesions around the site of the bite (generally seven to 14 days after the tick has consumed a blood meal) accompanied by fever, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, and/or joint aches. If you experience any of the signs or symptoms seven days or more following a known tick bite, you should consult your physician.

For more information, visit: www.fightthebittenow.com.

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Lake County Health Department
3010 Grand Avenue
Waukegan, Illinois 60085
(847) 377-8000

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