

Lyme Disease in New Hampshire

New Hampshire continues to have one of the highest rates of Lyme disease in the nation and ~60% of blacklegged ticks sampled in NH are infected with *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the bacterium that causes Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is transmitted by the bite of the deer tick, also known as the blacklegged tick. Although these ticks have a 2-year life cycle, the greatest risk for human acquisition of tickborne diseases is between May and August when the aggressive nymph stage of the blacklegged tick is active. Nymphs are very small (< 2mm) and easy to miss unless they become engorged with blood.

Over the last decade, reported Lyme disease cases have increased significantly in NH. In 2014, there were an estimated 1,415 new cases of Lyme disease in NH. The highest disease rates occurred in Rockingham, Strafford and Hillsborough counties. Compared to national data from 2013 (the most recent available), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that NH had the second highest incidence rate of Lyme disease in the United States (100.0 confirmed cases per 100,000 population). Only Vermont had a higher rate of reported disease in 2013. NH Lyme disease data and maps by county and town from 2006-2013 are available at <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/lyme/publications.htm>.

The risk of Lyme disease for any individual depends on their outdoor activities and the abundance of infected ticks. Tick surveillance performed during 2007-2010 in NH counties showed that >50% of ticks tested in most counties were infected with the bacteria causing Lyme disease with the exception of slightly lower rates (40%) in Belknap and Carroll counties, and very low numbers of ticks collected in Coos County, precluding prevalence assessment.

You can prevent tickborne disease by:

- Avoiding tick-infested areas when possible and stay on the path when hiking to avoid brush.
- Wearing light-colored clothing that covers arms and legs so ticks can be more easily seen.
- Tucking pants into socks before going into wooded or grassy areas.
- Apply insect repellent (20-30% DEET) to exposed skin. Other repellent options may be found here: <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/insect/choose.htm>
- Outdoor workers in NH are at particular risk of tickborne diseases and they should be reminded about methods of prevention.
- Doing daily tick checks to look for ticks on the body, especially warm places like behind the knees, the groin, and the back and neck.
- Pets returning inside may also bring ticks with them. Performing tick checks and using tick preventives on pets will minimize this occurrence.
- Showering soon after returning indoors to wash off any unattached ticks and check clothes for any ticks that might have been carried inside. Placing clothes in the dryer on high heat for an hour effectively kills ticks.
- Removing ticks promptly using tweezers. Tick removal within 36 hours of attachment can prevent disease.
- Monitoring for signs and symptoms of tickborne diseases for 30 days after a tick bite.
- Patients should contact their healthcare provider if symptoms develop.

Additional background information about tickborne diseases and prevention can be

found in the State of New Hampshire Tickborne Disease Prevention Plan at:

<http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/lyme/documents/tbdpreventionplan.pdf>

For any questions regarding the contents of this message, please contact NH DHHS, DPHS, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at 603-271-4496 (after hours 1-800-852-3345 ext.5300).