

Cook County
Department of Public Health
Cook County Bureau of Health Services



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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WARMER TEMPERATURES SIGNAL TICK SEASON

Ticks now part of the landscape in suburban Cook County

As the temperature begins to inch up, more people head outside to hike, bike, explore and enjoy the forest preserves and trails that dot suburban Cook County. Residents are being reminded that ticks positive for *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the bacterium that causes Lyme disease have been identified in some southwest suburban forest preserve areas as well as in a section of the northwest suburbs. Lyme disease is transmitted by the bite of a deer tick, (also known as the blacklegged tick) and can be a potentially serious illness.

"This does not mean that people should not enjoy the preserves," said Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) chief operating officer Stephen A. Martin, Jr., Ph.D, M.P.H. "Taking a walk or bike ride is great for your health, but at the same time it is important to avoid being bitten by wearing repellent and checking yourself for ticks if you have ventured into areas where they may be present."

To contract Lyme disease, a person must be bitten by a deer tick that is infected with the Lyme disease bacteria. Ticks are most likely to spread disease during the nymph stage, when they are very small and can feed without being detected.

Adult ticks are found in grass, shrubs, brush, and other vegetation--particularly along animal trails or footpaths. When brushed by a

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moving body, they quickly let loose of the plant on which they are resting and attach to an animal or human.

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"This is not a high risk situation, but we do want the public to understand that being cautious and prepared is the smartest and safest way to avoid illness," Dr. Martin said.

Early symptoms of Lyme disease include a characteristic "bull's-eye" rash, consisting of an expanding reddened area, sometimes with a clear area in the middle, at the original site of the tick bite. The rash may expand in size to cover a very large area, or can appear in several places on other parts of the body. Other symptoms may include fever, swollen lymph nodes, headache, chills, and pain in the muscles or joints. If left untreated, Lyme disease infection can spread to the musculoskeletal system, heart, and the nervous system.

To avoid tick bites, health officials suggest:

- Stay away from tick habitats if possible, such as heavily wooded areas. In forest preserve settings, stay on well traveled paths and walk in the center of the trail to avoid brushing up against bushes and weeds.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothes or exposed skin (except the face). Be sure to wash treated skin after coming indoors. Follow label directions; do not misuse or overuse repellents. Always supervise children in the use of repellents.
- Wear clothes that will help to shield you from ticks. Light-colored, long-sleeved shirts and long pants are best. Tuck your pants into the top of your socks or boots, to create a "tick barrier."

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- Remove ticks slowly and gently using a pair of tweezers. Avoid folk remedies like Vaseline, nail polish remover or burning matches - they are not a safe or effective way to remove ticks.
- Make sure the property around your home does not attract ticks. Because ticks are sensitive to dry conditions and do not thrive

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in short
vegetation, they are seldom a problem in well-maintained lawns.

- Free-roaming dogs and cats are much more likely to encounter ticks than those that are confined to the home or yard. If ticks are found on pets, contact your veterinarian for information about appropriate tick treatment removal.

If you have an unexplained fever with illness following a tick bite or you've been in vegetation that could be a tick habitat, contact a medical provider immediately. More information is available at www.cookcountypublichealth.org, the Illinois Department of Public Health's website, www.idph.state.il.us/health/infect/reportdis/lyme.htm, and on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/lyme/ld_transmission.htm.

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