



NEWS RELEASE

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State Health Department Urges Caution During Tick Season

BISMARCK, N.D. – Springtime and warm weather means people are spending more time outdoors and are more at risk for tick-borne diseases. This tick season, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) encourages residents to take measures to avoid tick bites and the potential for serious tick-borne diseases.

“Tick-borne diseases such as tularemia, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease can be prevented by taking some basic precautions to avoid tick bites,” said Alicia Lepp, epidemiologist with the Department of Health’s Division of Disease Control. “Areas that are heavily wooded or have tall grass or brush are more likely to be infested with ticks, especially between April and September, with the highest risk of disease transmission occurring during the warmer months.”

The NDDoH offers the following tips to help reduce the chance of ticks making contact with your skin:

- Wear light-colored clothing to make the ticks easier to see.
- Wear long pants, and tuck the legs into your socks or boots.
- Keep your shirt tucked in.
- Apply insect repellent that contains DEET to your clothes and exposed skin. Always follow label directions. (Repellents that contain permethrin should be used only on clothing.)

“One of the best ways to prevent tick bites is to avoid habitats where ticks can be found,” Lepp said. “However, if these tick-infested areas cannot be avoided use insect repellent to reduce the risk of disease. It is also important to remove and wash all clothing as soon as you are back inside from being outdoors and check carefully for ticks. Use tweezers to remove any ticks that have attached to your body.”

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According to Lepp, the best way to remove a tick is to use tweezers to grasp it as closely to the skin as possible and gently pull upward with a steady, even pressure until it is free. Avoid crushing the tick during removal. Make sure to wash your hands and the site of tick attachment with soap and water after removal.

In 2012, the NDDoH reported 14 cases of Lyme disease, three of tularemia, three of anaplasmosis and one of Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Tularemia and Rocky Mountain spotted fever are transmitted by the bite of an infected dog tick, which is the most common tick found in North Dakota. Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, babesiosis and ehrlichiosis are diseases that are associated with the bite of a deer tick, which has been identified in areas in the northeastern region of North Dakota.

The most common symptoms of tick-borne diseases include fever and chills, headache, fatigue, muscle aches and joint pain. Distinctive rashes may also develop. In Lyme disease, a circular rash called erythema migrans may appear 3-30 days after the tick bite, in Rocky Mountain spotted fever a rash may begin 2-5 days after fever onset as small, flat, pink non-itchy spots on the wrists, forearms, and ankles and spreads to the trunk, and in tularemia a skin ulcer may appear at the site of the tick bite.

Early detection and treatment of tick-borne illness is important to decrease the risk of serious complications, so people should seek medical care if they develop an illness suggestive of a tick-borne disease.

For more information on tick-borne diseases and tick bite prevention, call Alicia Lepp, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/disease/tickborne.

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