

COUNTY OF



ALLEGHENY

RICH FITZGERALD
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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CONTACT: Guillermo Cole
Public Information Officer
412-578-8004
gcole@achd.net

Health Department Offers Tips on How to Avoid Ticks and Lyme Disease
Reported Cases Increased Significantly in 2013

PITTSBURGH – In response to a recent increase in the number of reported cases, the Allegheny County Health Department is offering advice on how to reduce the risk of Lyme disease, which can be contracted in wooded areas as well as yards and neighborhoods with low bushes or tall grass, from which ticks that spread the disease can most easily attach to a person.

In 2013, 145 cases of Lyme disease were reported in county residents, up sharply from several years ago. From 2004 through 2008, the number of cases fluctuated between 16 and 35 per year.

Lyme disease, transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected tick, may be acquired not only on trips outside the area but also increasingly so locally, because the tick that transmits Lyme disease, *Ixodes scapularis*, also known as the deer tick, is the most commonly found tick on people and pets in Allegheny County.

In 2013, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection tested 56 deer ticks found in Allegheny County for *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the bacteria that cause Lyme disease, and found that 19 or 34% of the ticks were infected.

“If caught early, Lyme disease can almost always be successfully treated with antibiotics. When it goes undiagnosed and untreated, serious complications may develop such as chronic arthritis and neurologic problems. Some people may remain untreated because early symptoms are usually mild and flu-like and don’t always include a telltale “bull’s-eye rash” that can appear 3 to 30 days after the bite,” said Health Director Dr. Karen Hacker.

Three other tickborne diseases similar to Lyme disease were recently made reportable by the Health Department – Babesiosis, Anaplasmosis and Ehrlichiosis. These diseases are all on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control’s list of nationally notifiable diseases and known to occur in Pennsylvania

Health officials urge these precautions to protect yourself and family from tickborne diseases:

- Avoid places where ticks are likely to be present – wooded and bushy areas with high grass and a lot of leaf litter – especially from late May through August when most tick bites tend to occur.
- Stay in open spaces or on trails when walking in the woods to avoid contact with overgrown grass, brush and leaf litter. Ticks can’t jump or fly and one must come into actual contact with you in order to attach itself and bite you.
- Wear long pants, long sleeves and long socks to keep ticks off your skin. Tuck pant legs into socks or boots and shirts into pants to keep ticks on the outside of your clothing. Wear light-colored garments to spot ticks more easily.

- Use insect-repellent with 20% to 30% DEET on bare skin. Follow instructions carefully, especially with children. For added protection, spray a second repellent containing Permethrin on shoes and clothing. Don't use Permethrin on bare skin, but it can be applied to dogs.
- Remove ticks from your clothing before going indoors. To kill any you may have missed, wash your clothes in hot water and dry them on high heat for at least an hour.
- Bath or shower with a wash cloth after coming indoors to wash off ticks.
- Check your skin for ticks after being outdoors, even in your own yard. Inspect all parts of your body carefully and remove ticks immediately using a fine-tipped tweezers. If you remove a tick within 24 hours, your chance of getting Lyme disease is extremely small.
- Monitor your health closely after a tick bite and be alert for any signs or symptoms of Lyme disease.
- Keep the yard around your house clean and free of leaf litter, tall grass, brush and other things that may attract ticks or birds, deer, mice, chipmunks and other small mammals that serve as their hosts.
- Examine household pets for ticks after they go outside and remove them, because a loose tick can easily brush off your pet and attach itself to you.
- Consider using insecticides to control ticks on your property. Two applications a year can significantly reduce the tick population. Follow the label instructions carefully.

For additional information about tick control and tickborne disease prevention, please call the Allegheny County Health Department at **412-687-ACHD**.

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KAREN A. HACKER, MD, MPH, DIRECTOR
ALLEGHENY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT – PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
 955 RIVERMONT DRIVE • PITTSBURGH, PA 15207
 PHONE (412) 578-8004 • FAX (412) 578-8325 • WWW.ACHD.NET

