

Penn State **EXTENSION**

AGRICULTURE | COMMUNITY & FAMILY | ENVIRONMENT

Health Notes

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Cooperative Extension in York County

grow
A Healthy Community

Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is a tick-borne illness transmitted to humans by the immature black-legged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*). Adult ticks feed primarily on deer, but will use other mammalian hosts. The larvae and nymphs (immatures) feed on the white-footed mouse (which serves as the natural disease reservoir) and other rodents and birds.

Early stages of the disease include: circular rash 3-30 days after bite in 70-80% of infected people, fatigue, chills and fever. If not treated, the disease can progress to later stages, which can include the loss of muscle tone on one or both sides of the face, severe headaches and neck stiffness and rotating joint pain. After several months, 60% of infected people develop severe arthritis problems and up to 5% develop neurological problems.

There are a number of potential reasons for the increased incidents of Lyme disease. First, an increase in the overall tick population due to mild winters and a supply of natural host animals. Second, the over-abundant deer population in close proximity to humans. Third, establishment of more residences in wooded areas. Finally, an increased recognition of the disease by the general public.

How do you protect yourself from ticks? Wear light-colored clothing and tuck pants into socks. Use a DEET or permethrin based repellent. Repellents are not as effective against the black legged tick, so use at least 30% - 40% active ingredient. Avoid contact with vegetation, particularly overhanging plants near woodlines, paths, sidewalks, etc. If you spend time in tick habitats, remove and dry (high heat) field clothing as soon as possible. Finally, inspect yourself and your children at least once a day in summer for ticks.

Rabies - A Constant Threat

Rabies is a threat in York and surrounding counties. Looking at the number of confirmed rabies cases in York County gives a false sense of security when you realize that for each confirmed case, there are numerous non-tested cases. For rabies to be confirmed, the animal carcass must be taken to the State Diagnostic Lab in Harrisburg, where brain tissue is examined to make a positive confirmation. Confirmation is reported to the State Veterinarian who makes decisions regarding quarantine or treatment pertaining to animals. The Health Department gets involved when human exposure occurs. Exposure is not limited to being bitten by a suspect animal. Rabies is a virus carried in the saliva of the infected animal. Exposure can include handling food and water dishes infected with saliva or handling an animal that seems to be producing unusual amounts of saliva. In humans, once the symptoms of rabies appear there is little chance of survival. A person exposed to a confirmed rabid animal will be given a series of treatments over a 28 day period. An undiagnosed animal that was infected and had exposure to a human could be deadly.

Any mammal can carry rabies. The best protection against rabies is to keep pets up to date on rabies vaccinations. Be aware of abnormal behavior of animals in your area. For instance, if you see a bat crawling on the ground during daylight, it is an indication the bat may be infected. Nocturnal animals are active after dark. They include raccoons, skunks, foxes, and opossums. Most animals infected with rabies will stagger because rabies affects the nervous system. Many will appear aggressive; most will produce large amounts of saliva, and in some farm animals, an increase in vocalization is the only behavior suggesting rabies. For more information on rabies, contact Linda Spahr at Penn State Cooperative Extension at (717) 840-7145.

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West Nile Virus Infections – A Nationwide Human Health Issue

Everyone should take steps to reduce their risk of becoming infected with West Nile Virus. If you plan to be outside, remember to use insect repellent containing DEET -- especially in the evening and during dusk to dawn. Also, wear long sleeves and light-colored clothing.

Any water standing stagnant for 4 or more days can produce mosquitoes. Common sources of standing water are clogged gutters, cans, plastic containers, pots, and tires. Ornamental pools and swimming pools must be properly maintained and in running condition.

Last year in the US, there were 4,269 human cases of West Nile Virus. 177 of those infections were fatal. In Pennsylvania, West Nile Virus cases occur primarily in the late summer through early fall, although mosquito season is usually April through October.

DEP and York County West Nile Virus field assistants will be looking for immature (larvae and pupae) and adult mosquitoes to determine if they are the species known to carry the virus. Because dead birds can be an indicator of increased risk for West Nile Virus infections, people are asked to report dead birds at the Pennsylvania West Nile Web site at www.westnile.state.pa.us, or by calling your county West Nile Program Office or the Harrisburg office of the Department of Environmental Protection at (717) 346-8238. For information about West Nile virus symptoms in humans, contact the Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH, or visit the West Nile Web site at www.westnile.state.pa.us.

Food Safety and Security: What Consumers Need to Know

What Food and Water Should You Keep in Case of Emergency?

The American Red Cross and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security recommend the following:

- ◆ Keep a supply of nonperishable food and a 3-day supply of commercially bottled water per person (minimum of 3 gallons) on hand in case of an emergency.
- ◆ Since there may not be power, purchase food that requires no refrigeration, cooking, water or special preparation. Good food choices include dried fruit; canned fruit or vegetables; shelf-stable cans of meat, poultry, and fish; jars of peanut butter and jelly; small packages of cereal, granola bars and crackers; nonfat dry milk; and small boxes of juice drinks. Select small cans of food so there won't be any leftovers that will need refrigeration. Remember to include infant formula, pet food, and foods for family members with special dietary needs.

Have a manually operated can opener on hand. Periodically use and refresh your supply. More ideas for foods to keep on hand are available at www.ready.gov.



How Long Should Canned Foods Be Kept?

Store canned foods and other shelf-stable products in a cool, dry place. Never put them above the stove, under the sink, in a damp garage or basement, or any place exposed to high or low temperature extremes. Store high-acid foods, such as tomatoes and other fruit, up to 18 months. Low-acid foods, such as meat and vegetables, can be kept 2 to 5 years.

While extremely rare, a toxin produced by *Clostridium botulinum* is the worst danger in canned foods. **NEVER USE** food from containers that show signs of "botulism": leaking, bulging, rusting, or badly dented cans; cracked jars; jars with loose or bulging lids; canned food with a foul odor; or any container that spurts liquid when opening. **DO NOT TASTE THIS FOOD!** Even the tiniest amount of *botulinum* toxin can be deadly.