

Letter to the Editor:

Tick season is again upon us. While Lyme disease can occur at any time of the year, the months of May-July present the greatest risk for developing Lyme disease. Lyme disease is highly prevalent in Windham County, impacting residents and visitors of all ages, especially children aged 5-15 and adults from 40-60.

Preventing tick bites is the most effective way to avoid Lyme disease. The CDC recommends avoiding highly wooded areas, as well as places with tall grass. Additionally, wearing shoes and socks, long pants that are tucked into socks, long-sleeved shirts, and hats and gloves can limit exposure to ticks. Insect repellent can also be helpful. Repellent with at least 20% concentration of DEET has been shown to reduce tick bites; follow instructions carefully, as chemical repellents may be toxic. Parents should be especially careful when applying repellent to their children to avoid their children's hands, mouth, and eyes. After coming inside, check your skin carefully for ticks, which are often no bigger than the head of a pin. Be sure to check under your arms, the back of the knees, in all body hair, and other hard to reach locations with a mirror. Additionally, showering with a washcloth after being outdoors can help remove ticks before they attach themselves. Many times, it takes several hours for a tick to embed themselves into the skin.

If you are bitten by a tick, use tweezers to remove the tick promptly. It is crucial to remove the tick near its head or mouth. Apply slow traction, being careful to not squeeze or crush the tick. If a small portion of the head remains, the skin will eventually slough it off; if a large portion remains, call your primary care office. Dispose the tick after removal and clean the skin with soap and water or rubbing alcohol.

Not all tick bites result in Lyme disease. If possible, it is important to identify the species of tick. Check the Vermont Department of Health website to see if the tick is a blacklegged tick (*Ixodes* species), otherwise known as a deer tick. While other types of ticks can cause disease in humans, the deer tick is the only species that carries Lyme disease. It is not always easy to know how long a tick has been attached to the skin. However, it is important to remember that it takes between 24-36 hours of attachment for Lyme disease to be transmitted. If you have been bitten by a deer tick, particularly if it has been attached for an unknown or long amount of time, it is worth calling your primary care office to ask about a course of antibiotics to prevent Lyme disease from occurring.

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