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IT'S THE START OF TICK SEASON

by F. Calderone-Steichen, MPH

The Hopewell Valley Deer Task Force would like to remind residents that spring is the time when ticks emerge, and that some of those ticks may be deer ticks, a tiny tick about the size of a sesame seed. Deer ticks are spread by deer and mice and can carry the bacterium for Lyme disease. Common habitats for the deer tick are leaf litter in woody areas, grassy areas along woodlands, and low bushes and shrubs. Deer ticks are not commonly found on athletic fields, cut lawns, or agricultural fields.

Wearing proper clothing such as closed shoes rather than sandals, pants that can be tucked into socks, and insect repellents containing DEET can all reduce the risk of getting bitten. Other important risk reducers are checking yourself and your children carefully after being outdoors and taking a shower after cutting the grass or working or playing outside. For those who have experienced problems with deer ticks in their back yard, an environmentally friendly product called Daminix Tick Tubes may help to reduce the number of ticks in a limited area. The product is available on-line at www.ticktubes.com.

If you do find a tick on yourself or a family member, remember that incorrect removal can increase the risk for Lyme disease. Using tweezers, grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible; pull gently with a steady backward pressure—be patient, don't yank or jerk—then wash the area with soap, water, and a topical antiseptic. Write a note to yourself about the date on which you found the tick. Should symptoms develop such as an expanding "bull's eye" rash, flu-like symptoms or achy joints, contact your physician immediately. Lyme disease is easy to treat in the early stages, but is more difficult to treat and has more serious consequences as time goes on. Consult your family physician for further information. Family pets should also be protected and regularly checked for ticks. Consult your vet as to which products will work best for your cat or dog.

An eight-year longitudinal study in Connecticut found that when deer populations were decreased substantially, deer tick populations were reduced and the incidence of Lyme disease dropped by 83%. Information on this study and the correlation of deer densities and the abundance and distribution of ticks and Lyme disease can be found at <http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/urbandeer07.pdf>.

Hopewell Valley has seen an increase in deer in the past few years on farm acreage, green acres and park land, and suburban backyards. The next article from the Hopewell Valley Deer Task Force will focus on the results of a recent deer count that is in the process of being completed and tabulated.

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