

Healthy Living

Ticks are to blame for Lyme disease transmission

The arrival of warm weather can be a welcome relief for those who experience a winter's worth of snow, ice and sub-freezing temperatures. While a spring thaw may usher in the return of flowers and more time spent outdoors, warmer seasons also mark the return of pests that can cause illnesses.

Tick territories are expanding

Ticks are prevalent in many parts of the country and their territories are expanding due to climate change. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says tick territories are rapidly expanding into higher altitudes, and even stretching into Canada. Milder winters and increased wildlife hosts are two reasons. This has led to a surge in Lyme disease in recent years.

What are ticks?

The Illinois Department of Public Health says ticks are commonly thought of as insects, but they actually are arachnids like spiders.

With two sets of four legs and sharp mouth parts that cut into the skin, ticks are parasites that feed on blood. Ticks are opportunistic feeders, and will attach to pets, wild animals and people. They do not jump or fly, but rather "quest;" waiting on vegetation to latch onto a passing host.

Ticks survive winter by living underground. As soon as the weather warms to 46 F (8 C), they become active again and start looking for food hosts. Ticks are usually active from March to November, says the National Institute of Health. When a person or animal brushes up against tall grass or shrubs, the tick will grab on. They don't normally bite right away, but seek areas of soft skin. Then the tick uses its mouth parts to cut into the skin and insert a feeding tube, which also serves as an anchor. It then feeds until it is full, often swelling up several sizes in the process. The NIH says sometimes a tick can stay

latched on for up to two weeks if it isn't found and removed.

Disease vectors Ticks are major vectors of disease. Unlike mosquitoes, ticks don't bite and then move on. When they bury their heads into the skin they can pass on illnesses; ticks can transmit bacteria, viruses and parasites into the blood. Several illnesses

can be traced back to ticks, including Alpha-Gal syndrome, Anaplasmosis, Colorado Tick Fever, and Ehrlichiosis. However, most people are familiar with the connection between ticks and Lyme disease. The CDC says Lyme disease is almost exclusively transmitted through the bite of an infected black-legged (deer)

tick. There is no credible scientific evidence that Lyme disease spreads between humans via sexual contact, kissing or pregnancy.

Avoid ticks Wearing long pants outdoors and inspecting the body for ticks can reduce the risk of being bitten by a tick. It's also important to check pets and use repellents, as com-

panion animals can track ticks indoors where they can end up on people, too. Making backyards less hospitable to ticks also can help. Keeping the lawn short, removing brush and leaf litter, and creating a three-foot barrier of wood chips, gravel or mulch between wooded areas and lawns can keep ticks at bay.

Common seasonal allergy triggers

Seasonal allergies affect a significant percentage of the global population. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as much as 30 percent of the global population is affected by seasonal allergies, which can be marked by uncomfortable and disruptive symptoms such as sneezing, itchy and/or watery eyes, a runny or stuffy nose, and irritation of the throat.

As uncomfortable and disruptive as seasonal allergies can be, they are often manageable with over-the-counter (OTC) medications like Zyrtec®.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, medications like Zyrtec® work by blocking histamine, a substance the body releases during an allergic reaction. Seasonal allergy sufferers are urged to speak with their physicians and visit an allergist prior to taking any new medications, including OTC options. It also can help to identify seasonal allergy triggers. While people tend to associate seasonal allergies with spring and early summer, the makers of Zyrtec® note that seasonal allergies can affect people throughout the year. Triggers vary by season, and

some overlap the seasons. Recognition of common seasonal allergy triggers can be an important step in combatting the unpleasant and often disruptive side effects of flare-ups.

Spring The makers of Zyrtec® note that tree pollen, grass pollen and weed pollen are common seasonal allergy triggers in spring. Tree pollen is the first seasonal allergy trigger to emerge in spring, but grass pollen and weed pollen are additional springtime triggers. Seasonal allergy sufferers are urged to monitor daily pollen counts, including tree pollen counts, and avoid going outside on particularly windy spring days.

Summer Grass pollen is a significant seasonal allergy trigger in summer. Fungus spores and mold also can trigger seasonal allergies in spring, as the makers of Zyrtec® note that hot

and humid weather creates an ideal environment for mold to grow. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) notes that fungus spores tend to grow on grasses, grains, logs, and compost piles from July through early fall. To reduce the risk of a seasonal allergy attack in summer, avoid mowing the lawn on days when you plan to entertain outside or relax outdoors, as mowing spreads grass pollen around, increasing the risk of a reaction.

Seasonal allergies can strike throughout the year. Identifying triggers can help people avoid them with a goal of reducing the discomfort of seasonal allergic reactions.



Together, we can protect our children and build a brighter future

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. At the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC), we believe every child deserves a safe and healthy life. This month, we're focusing on preventing abuse and supporting families in need.

What can you do to help?

The CAC offers services like child-friendly interviews, specialized medical care and trauma-informed advocacy and counseling to support children and families. Prevention begins with education and community action. Here are some ways you can help the children in your community:

- Learn to recognize the signs of child abuse.
- Share resources and information with friends, family and neighbors.
- Support organizations like the CAC that are making a critical difference.

Every step counts. Together, we can break the cycle of abuse and build a stronger, safer community for everyone.

Learn more about how you can help

If you suspect that a child in your family or community is experiencing or has been exposed to, abuse, neglect, crime or violence, contact ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313, available 24/7. Calls can be anonymous, and reporting concerns could make all the difference in a child's life. You can also call 911 to make a report to law enforcement.

Let's stand together this April — and every day — to protect our children.

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Spring is the season of fresh starts, and St Patrick's Day is a reminder that a little luck goes a long way. But when it comes to your hearing, healthy habits matter even more.

One simple way to support your hearing? *Get moving.*
Try these gentle activities for a positive difference!

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