

# Ticks are out in force

## Lyme disease risk is high in Fauquier

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Lyme disease, the most commonly reported vector-borne illness in the country, continues to rise in Virginia, and with spring in session after a very warm winter, it's not expected to ease anytime soon.

According to a report from the Virginia Department of Health, the number of reported cases in the state has increased every year since 2000, with a 300 percent increase in the number of reported incidents in 2007.

The Centers for Disease Control lists Virginia as one of 12 states that made up 94 percent of Lyme disease cases reported in the United States in 2010.

The other states greatly effected by the illness are Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Fauquier County has faced a high number of Lyme disease incidents since 2003, and, every year, the county has had a higher average number of cases than the state average.

Only Warren and Clarke counties average 100 cases or more.

"We need to consider steps to fend off an almost invisible danger," said Robin Earl, Fauquier Hospital's PR specialist.

Symptoms of Lyme disease can develop within days after an infectious tick bite, the most common being the erythemamigrans, or "bull's-eye" rash, around the bite. It can expand to up to 12 inches in diameter.

The rash doesn't itch or hurt, meaning it could go unnoticed by the victim, increasing the risk of further infection.

If the bite isn't treated properly in the early stages, other symptoms begin to develop, including fatigue, fever, headaches, muscle aches and joint pains.

The infection can lead to further problems when left untreated, such as severe arthritis and swelling in larger joints, usually knees, and even neurological and heart problems.

There is currently no known vaccination for the disease, which is why Dr. Tam Ly, infectious disease specialist at Fauquier Hospital, stresses the importance of identifying symptoms early and seeing a doctor as soon as they appear so that antibiotics can be administered as soon as possible.

"The earlier they are started, the better," she said. "Recognizing the signs and symptoms of the disease may help detect and treat it earlier, avoiding the serious complications that can appear during the later stages of the disease. During the early stages, doctors will consider the symptoms, exposure and medical history of bitten victims to determine if they have the disease."

The tick-borne illness most frequently infects children between ages 5-10, and adults ages 40-60. But anyone can be infected if they spend time in or near forested areas where ticks are found.

In Virginia, only the black-legged tick, or "deer tick" carries and transmits Lyme disease after feeding on infected forest rodents such as white-footed mice.

While most ticks are harmless, deer ticks are one of the few species that can carry and transmit germs, and they're harder to detect because they are much smaller. An adult deer tick is about the size of a sesame seed.

The Lyme disease agent can be transmitted to humans only if one of these infected ticks attaches itself and feeds on a person's body for at least 36 hours.

With spring now in full swing, Dr. Ly encourages people to cover themselves well and to take extra precautions when outside to lower the risk of being bitten.

"Ticks that carry Lyme disease thrive in humid, wooded areas," she said, "but they die quickly in dry, sunny environments. Mow the lawn and clear leaf litter, tall grasses and brush around the home frequently," she advised

Ly also recommends everyone working or playing outside, especially near wooded areas, use insect repellent, and wear lightly colored clothing to easily detect ticks, particularly long pants with the legs tucked into long socks or boots and long-sleeve shirts tucked in to keep ticks away from the skin. Email the reporter: [ekambach@timespapers.com](mailto:ekambach@timespapers.com).