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Spring Also Brings Lyme Ticks

Loudoun Raising Disease Awareness

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[Loudoun County](#) officials have launched an aggressive public-health campaign with brochures and Facebook listings to combat the rising rate of Lyme disease cases in the county.

Last week, the county Board of Supervisors declared May "Lyme Disease Awareness Month" in Loudoun. The county Health Department is distributing 55,000 English and Spanish-language brochures about the disease to schools, community centers and libraries. It's also listing the county government's Lyme disease Web site on the county's Facebook page and elsewhere on the social networking site.

The awareness campaign is in response to what has become a growing public health issue in the county and region. The number of yearly reported Lyme disease cases in Loudoun has increased from 29 to more than 500 since 2000.

"We really want to see what we can do to try to cut our numbers down this year," said David Goodfriend, Loudoun's health director.

The growing infection rate is partly due to more doctors reporting diagnosed cases of Lyme disease to the county, officials said. Also, more infected people are seeking treatment for the disease's flulike symptoms and bull's-eye skin rash.

But the increase in Lyme disease cases is also because of a rise in black-legged ticks moving into Loudoun over the past decade, officials said. The insects carry and transmit Lyme disease.

Ticks tend to hide in the shade of overgrown vegetation or forested areas, so most people in the county are contracting Lyme disease on their property, Goodfriend said.

"You don't have to have a large property or live in a rural area," he said. "The people who get Lyme disease come from every Zip code in Loudoun County."

The health department is launching its campaign now because Lyme-disease-carrying ticks are prevalent in the spring and early summer, when people spend more time outdoors.

Health officials are encouraging Loudoun residents to keep their lawns groomed and free of rodents, which can carry ticks. People who engage in outdoor activities are advised to wear long sleeves, long pants and socks to prevent ticks from latching onto their skin.

An infected person should seek medical treatment immediately, Goodfriend said, because the disease can be treated with antibiotics.

"For the large majority of people, if you catch it early, it's very treatable," he said.

For more information, go to <http://www.loudoun.gov/lyme>.