

# Lyme disease incidents are rising in area

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The Winchester Star

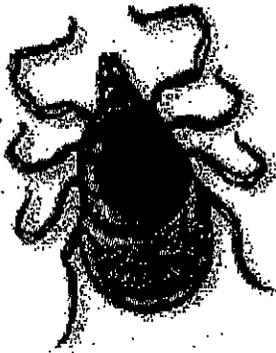
**WINCHESTER** — The number of Lyme disease cases in the northern Shenandoah Valley is rising.

Reports of the tick-borne bacterial infection increased from 78 in 2007 to 128 in 2008 for the Lord Fairfax Area Health District, according to preliminary data cited by district epidemiologist Travis Carr.

The district serves Winchester and Frederick, Clarke, Warren, Shenandoah, and Page counties.

The figures are in line with those for the Washington metropolitan area, which saw cases double from 2006 to 2007.

More than half of Virginia's cases were reported in nearby Loudoun County, according to The Associated Press and The Washington Post.



Carr said he believes the increase in cases can be attributed to heightened awareness and the development of farm and forest land.

People are moving into tick habitats, he said, and the ticks "are pushing back."

Lyme disease tends to have cyclical highs and lows, Carr said. The number of lab-confirmed Virginia cases dropped from 959 in 2007 to 933 (according to preliminary data) in 2008.

Lyme disease is spread by the bite of black-legged ticks and the bite site is often marked by a "bull's eye" skin rash known as erythema migrans.

The patterned rash appears in about 80 percent of Lyme cases, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Other symptoms include fever, headache, and fatigue, and if untreated, the disease can affect the joints, heart, and nervous system, the CDC states on its Web site.

John Lewis of Millwood didn't have any of the typical Lyme disease symptoms when he went to an orthopedic surgeon a year ago for treatment of a swollen knee.

As the surgeon searched for the source of his ailment, Lewis underwent X-rays and magnetic resonance imaging, both of which revealed nothing.

Lewis said his doctor, suspecting Lyme, ordered blood tests. In the meantime, he was referred to a rheumatologist, but the results from his blood tests revealed the problem: Lyme disease.

Lewis said he was successfully treated with a course of antibiotics.

Antibiotics are used in the early and later stages of the disease, but the treatment lasts longer and is more complicated in the later stages, according to the Virginia Department of Health's Web site.

"If my doctor had not checked for all sorts of possible things, they may not have gotten it," Lewis said. "It's quite easy to pick [Lyme disease] up, but I was not aware of it."

Generally, a black-legged tick must remain biting on a person for 36 hours before Lyme disease is transmitted, he added.

Symptoms usually appear seven to 14 days after the disease is contracted.

People can try to prevent tick bites by avoiding areas with ticks, including tall grasses and vegetation, Carr said.

People should keep their skin covered by tucking pant legs into socks and wearing long-sleeved shirts, Carr added.

Wearing light-colored clothing is recommended, so that the tiny ticks are easier to see, according to the Virginia Department of Health.

Using a tick repellent with the chemical DEET is also recommended, Carr said.

If a tick is found, the state department of health offers the following instructions on its Web site: "Remove any attached ticks promptly by gripping the tick with tweezers as close to the skin as possible and using a gentle steady pulling action. Protect hands with gloves, cloth or tissue when removing ticks from people or animals."

On the Internet . . .

[www.vdh.state.va.us/epidemiology/DEE/Vectorborne/factsheets/lyme.htm](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/epidemiology/DEE/Vectorborne/factsheets/lyme.htm)

[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/d/dsd/lyme/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/d/dsd/lyme/index.htm)