

# TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic - 100 Old Billerica Rd., Bedford, MA 01730

Volume 19, Number 6

June 2014

## TICK TALK

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP



Tick season has roared in with the spring weather. Ticks love warm, humid conditions and thrive in the Northeast. So much so that the population has increased in the Bedford area over the past ten years. Not only is the climate perfect but the re-forestation of farm land has increased the deer population. Deer ticks or the Blacklegged Tick are a major health concern because they carry the organisms that cause Lyme disease, Babesiosis and Anaplasmosis. Dog ticks, on the other hand, do not carry these diseases but can carry Tularemia and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

While some of these diseases are gaining ground in New England, Lyme disease is endemic in the area and the most reported infectious disease in Bedford. Yet it can be prevented! The first step is understanding ticks and how one can reduce their risk of getting a tick-borne disease.

Young ticks (nymphs) are active from May through early August while adult ticks are active from September through May. Nymph ticks are the size of a poppy seed and 1 in 4 carry Lyme disease. Adult stage ticks are larger, the size of a sesame seed, and about 1 in 2 are carriers of Lyme disease. Ticks cannot jump or fly so they attach to people and pets, crawling up, looking for a place to feed.

Their favorite spots are between the toes, back of the knees, groin, armpits, neck along the hair line behind the ears.

An important prevention strategy is to check the body, paying special attention to the places where ticks like to attach after being outdoors. After inspection, take a shower and wash hair; clothing can be put in the dryer for 20 minutes. Try to wear light-colored, long sleeved shirts with long pants tucked into socks when walking and gardening. Repellents that contain DEET can be used on exposed skin. Permethrin is a product that can be used on clothing. Be sure to read product instructions carefully and use repellents with no more than 30% DEET. Don't forget to check pets after they have been outside.

If despite these precautions a tick attaches to the skin, it needs to be removed as quickly as possible. Do not use matches, petroleum jelly, gasoline or nail polish remover. Ticks are best removed by pulling straight up, not twisting. Note the date the tick was removed and save the tick for identification. The Clinic removes ticks and counsels Residents about symptoms of Lyme disease.

The early stage of Lyme disease is usually marked by one or more of the following symptoms and signs:





- **Fatigue**
- **Chills and fever**
- **Headache**
- **Swollen lymph glands**
- **A characteristic skin rash, called erythema migraines**

**Erythema migraines is a red circular patch, painless, that appears 3 to 14 days after the tick bite. It grows larger and the center may appear as a “bull’s eye.” Unlike erythema migrans, allergic reactions to tick saliva usually occur within hours to a few days after a tick bite and usually do not expand, disappearing within a few days.**

**The diagnosis of Lyme disease is based on clinical symptoms, a history of possible exposure to ticks and the results of blood tests. The blood tests do not measure the body’s production of antibodies to Lyme disease until 4 to 6 weeks after the infection. Nonetheless, treatment should be started based on clinical symptoms. If treatment with antibiotics is started in the early stage of the disease, the infection responds well.**

**Late Lyme disease presents with signs and symptoms weeks, months or years after a tick bite. Arthritis is most likely to appear as brief bouts of pain and swelling, usually in one or more large joints, especially the knees. Nervous system symptoms include numbness, pain, nerve paralysis (often of facial muscles) and meningitis. Rarely, irregularities of the heart may occur. Problems with memory, fatigue, headache and sleep disturbances may persist after treatment.**

**However, most people who are treated in the later stage of the disease also respond**

**well to antibiotics. Some do require a second course of antibiotic treatment. Longer courses of antibiotics have not been shown to be beneficial to people who were previously treated and have chronic symptoms. Varying degrees of permanent damage to the joints or the nervous system can develop with late Lyme disease. This typically occurs when Lyme disease is not recognized in the early stage or the initial treatment is inadequate. Because of the possibility of long-lasting effects of Lyme disease, it is important to seek treatment for flu-like symptoms or the characteristic rash even when a tick bite is not apparent.**

**Even more important, of course, is prevention. Remember to cover up, use DEET and check the body! Avoid tick-infested woods. If a tick still manages to bite, save it. The Town of Bedford offers free tick-testing service. Pack up the tick in a plastic bag and follow the instructions for mailing it to the lab on [www.TickDiseases.org](http://www.TickDiseases.org). It will be tested free for Lyme, Human Granulocytic Anaplasmosis (HGA) and Babesiosis.**

**For more information: [www.cdc.gov/Lyme](http://www.cdc.gov/Lyme); *The Bedford Citizen*, March & April 2014; The Bedford Board of Health: [www.bedfordma.gov/health](http://www.bedfordma.gov/health)**



## HEALTH EDUCATION TALK

**June 11, 2014**

**10:30 am—11:30 am**

**Auditorium**

**How do you want to be remembered? Learn about ways to record your stories and family history. Join us for a lecture from Claire B. Willis, author of, "*Lasting Words: A Guide to Finding Meaning Toward the Close of Life.*"**