



NEWS RELEASE

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State Health Department Urges Caution During Tick Season

BISMARCK, N.D. –This tick season, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) encourages residents to take measures to avoid tick bites and the potential for serious tick-borne diseases.

“Tick-borne diseases such as tularemia, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease can be prevented by taking some basic precautions to avoid tick bites,” said Michelle Feist, epidemiologist with the Department of Health’s Division of Disease Control. “Areas that are heavily wooded or have tall grass or brush are more likely to be infested with ticks, especially between April and September, with the highest risk of disease transmission occurring during the warmer months.”

The NDDoH offers the following tips for making it difficult for ticks to make contact with your skin:

- Wear light-colored clothing to make the ticks easier to see.
- Wear long pants, and tuck the legs into your socks or boots.
- Keep your shirt tucked in.
- Apply insect repellent that contains DEET to your clothes and exposed skin. Always follow label directions. (Repellents that contain permethrin should be used only on clothing.)

“After leaving a tick-infested area, it’s important to remove and wash all clothing as soon as possible,” Feist said. “Also, carefully check for ticks and use tweezers to remove any that have attached to your body.”

According to Feist, the best way to remove a tick is to use tweezers to grasp it as close as possible to the head and gently pull upward until it is free. Avoid crushing the tick during removal. Make sure to wash your hands and the site of tick attachment with soap and water after removal.

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In the last five years, six cases of tularemia, two cases of Rocky Mountain spotted fever and 78 cases of Lyme disease were reported in North Dakota. The most common tick in North Dakota is the dog tick, which is associated with the transmission of Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia. Last spring and summer, the North Dakota Department of Health, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, North Dakota State University and the University of North Dakota partnered to identify the different tick species in North Dakota, including the deer tick, which can carry Lyme disease. Through these surveillance efforts, the deer tick has been identified in areas in the northeastern region of the state. Finding the deer tick in North Dakota is a significant discovery because there could be areas in the state at risk for Lyme disease transmission. Ticks will be collected again this year to further assess the presence of the deer tick in North Dakota.

Symptoms of tularemia usually begin with a painless ulcer at the site of the tick bite and may include swollen glands. If the bacteria enter the bloodstream, more severe infections, including pneumonia, can occur.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is characterized by a sudden onset of fever, a general feeling of illness, deep muscle pain, severe headaches, chills and irritated eyes. A rash begins on about the third day of illness, usually appearing first on the hands and feet and then spreading to the rest of the body.

Symptoms of Lyme disease occur three to 32 days after infection. The first symptom is often a red rash near the tick bite, which develops in about 60 percent of patients. Other early symptoms include fatigue, fever, headache, stiff neck, sore muscles, swollen glands and painful joints. Without treatment, these symptoms may last several weeks or more. Arthritis, neurological or cardiac problems may develop weeks to months after the initial infection if the initial infection is not treated with antibiotics.

People who have symptoms that may be associated with a tick-related illness should consult their doctor.

For more information, call Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

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