

Residents cautioned to avoid ticks and tick-borne diseases

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With the arrival of cool and wet weather, ticks of medical concern are now active again. Butte County residents need to be alert for ticks that may be carrying Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases. Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District's (District) recent surveillance activities on Chico's Bidwell Park trails and the Lake Oroville Recreation Area trails have identified increased populations of the western black-legged tick (*Ixodes pacificus*), sometimes referred to as the deer tick.

The District wants to remind residents to take precautions while hiking, camping, biking and enjoying other outdoor activities. By taking measures to reduce exposure to ticks, residents can help protect themselves from tick-borne diseases.

Ticks are often found in naturally vegetated areas throughout Butte County. Ticks attach to animals and feed on their blood over several days. Preferring cool and moist environments, ticks are found in shaded grass, shrubs, and in leaf litter under trees in oak woodlands.

An individual may become infected with the bacteria that causes Lyme disease when they are bitten by an infected western black-legged tick. The smaller immature form of the tick known as a "nymph" is most active during the spring and early summer months. About the size of a pinhead, nymphs are often found on logs, grasses, fallen branches or tree limbs, low-growing shrubs, and among damp leaves that accumulate under trees. Because nymphs are so small, people may not notice if one attaches to them.

Early symptoms of Lyme disease often include a spreading "bull's-eye" rash, which is usually accompanied by symptoms such as fever and body aches. Prompt treatment with antibiotics can cure the disease, particularly when it is diagnosed early. If left untreated, symptoms can progress into arthritis or nervous system disorders.

Other tick-borne diseases include Rocky Mountain spotted fever, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis and babesiosis. The first line of defense against tick-borne diseases is taking precautions to avoid tick bites. Here are some things to remember: 2

- Avoid areas where ticks live, such as trail margins, brushy and grassy areas, and leaf litter.
- Stay on trails and avoid contact with high grass and brush
- Wear light colors so ticks can be easily seen if they get on you
- Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Tuck pant legs into boots or socks and tuck shirt into pants
- Use repellent registered for use against ticks. Always read and follow label directions when applying repellents
- Thoroughly check yourself and your children frequently for ticks, especially at the hairline and base of the scalp

- Routinely check pets for ticks and remove them promptly; check with your veterinarian for tick control products

Prompt removal of ticks may prevent disease transmission. To remove an attached tick, carefully grasp the tick with fine pointed tweezers as close to the skin as possible, and gently but firmly pull the tick straight out. Do not twist, burn or apply irritants to the tick, and avoid mashing or squeezing the body of the tick. Wash hands and the bite site with soap and water. To identify the tick (free of cost), place it in a jar or Ziploc bag with a piece of cotton or tissue moistened with water and bring the tick to the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District, 5117 Larkin Road, Oroville, CA. 95965, 533-6038 or 342-7350.