

Lyme disease ticks on the increase in Butte County

Staff Reports (ChicoER.com)

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OROVILLE — As spring approaches and outdoor activities increase, people need to protect themselves from ticks that may carry Lyme disease and other illnesses, according to the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District.

Recent district surveillance on trails in Chico's Bidwell Park trails and Lake Oroville Recreation Area has identified increased populations of the Western black-legged tick (*Ixodes pacificus*), sometimes referred to as the deer tick.

People may become infected with the bacteria that cause Lyme disease if they are bitten by an infected Western black-legged tick, according to a district news release.

The smaller, immature form of the tick known as a "nymph" is most active during the spring and early summer. 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.

Ticks attach to animals and feed on their blood over several days.

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 it is left untreated, symptoms can progress into arthritis or nervous-system disorders.

Other tick-borne diseases include Rocky Mountain spotted fever, anaplasmosis, erlichiosis

and babesiosis.

The first line of defense against tick-borne diseases is avoiding tick bites. Here are some methods:

- 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 reclosable plastic bag with a piece of cotton or tissue moistened with water, and bring the tick to the district office at 5117 Larkin Road in Oroville.

To have the tick tested for Lyme disease, take it to a Butte County Public Health Lab, 695 Oleander Ave. in Chico or 202 Mira Loma Drive in Oroville.

There is a fee for Lyme disease testing.

For more information, free brochures, or to request an educational presentation on Lyme disease, contact the district at 533-6038 or 342-7350, or visit www.bcmvcd.com.