

Disease-carrying ticks plentiful in Butte County

By MARY WESTON-Staff Writer

Posted: 02/23/2011 12:20:03 AM PST

OROVILLE — If you have been to recreation areas in Butte County and walked through wet, green grass or leaves, you need to check for ticks.

Recent testing by Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District at areas bordering the foothills netted a number of ticks that carry Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases.

Surveillance activities on Lake Oroville Recreation Area trails and Chico's Bidwell Park trails netted Western black legged ticks that are sometimes called deer ticks, said Doug Weseman, the district's public information officer.

"We're just warning people so they know if they have been in a recreation area and walked off in green grass, they need to check themselves and their dogs for ticks," Weseman said. The district found the ticks in upper Bidwell Park near Bear Hole on the Yahi Trail, and on trails at Lime Saddle and Loafer Creek.

In past years, the Western black-legged ticks found in these recreation areas have tested positive for Lyme disease.

However, ticks can be anywhere in the county in green grass with a lot of moisture. Blue-belly lizards and deer can also be hosts for ticks and carry them into an area.

"Our main message to the public is just to check for ticks," Weseman said. "They are everywhere."

The district tests for ticks every year when they come out when the weather warms up in the spring, which can be in February, March or April.

Typically, the Loafer Creek area has the largest number of ticks, Weseman said. A

person or a dog can become infected with the bacteria that cause Lyme disease after being bitten by an infected tick, according district officials.

Early symptoms of Lyme disease include a spreading bulls-eye rash about 80 percent of the time. The rash is often accompanied by fever and body aches.

Prompt treatment with antibiotics can cure the disease.

If untreated, the disease can lead to arthritis or nervous system disorders.

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

Nymphs are about the size of a pinhead and often found on logs, grasses, fallen branches, tree limbs, low-growing shrubs and damp leaves under trees. People might not notice that a nymph has attached to them because it is so small.

Adult ticks are often lurking in natural vegetation around the county, including shaded grass, shrubs and leaf material under trees in oak woodlands.

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

The vector district warns people to take precautions against tick bites when hiking, camping, biking and enjoying outdoor activities.

Avoid areas where ticks live, including trail margins, brushy and grassy areas and leaf debris.

Other precautions include the following:

- * Wear light colors so ticks can be seen
- * Wear long pants and long sleeves
- * Tuck pant legs into boots or socks
- * Tuck shirt into pants
- * Use a registered tick repellent, following the instructions

The district also advises people to check themselves and their children often for ticks, especially at the hairline and the base of the scalp.

Check pets routinely for ticks. Check with a veterinarian for tick control products and vaccinations.

Removing ticks promptly might prevent disease.

To remove a tick, carefully grasp the tick with fine pointed scissors as close to the skin as possible, and gently but firmly pull the tick straight out, according to district instructions. Do not twist, turn or apply irritants to the tick, and avoid mashing or squeezing the tick's body.

Wash hands and the bite with soap and water.

For a free identification of the tick, put it in a plastic ziplock bag with a piece of moistened piece of cotton and take it to the vector control district, 5117 Larkin Road in Oroville. Call the district at 533-6038 in Oroville or at 342-7357 in Chico. Log onto the district website at www.BCMVCD.com for a tick brochure.

For more information or to request an educational presentation on Lyme disease call the Oroville or Chico district office. To have a tick tested for free for Lyme disease, take the tick to the Butte County Public Health Lab, 695 Oleander Ave. in Chico or to 202 Mira Loma Drive in Oroville.