



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Wolf Administration Highlights Tick and Mosquito Awareness, Opportunities to Spend Time Outdoors

Harrisburg, PA – The Wolf Administration today urged Pennsylvania residents and visitors to take precautions to avoid ticks and mosquitoes when spending time outdoors this summer.

“Spending time outdoors and participating in physical activity is a key part of living a healthy life,” Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine said. “However, people need to be aware of ticks and mosquitoes and the serious diseases they carry. As Lyme disease and West Nile virus become more prevalent in Pennsylvania, it is important to protect yourself when spending time outdoors.”

This year Governor Tom Wolf bolstered funding to protect Pennsylvanians from Lyme disease, Zika virus, and West Nile virus through increases to improve mosquito and tick surveillance and provide education about the diseases associated with these insects.

“Through simple means like wearing insect repellent and avoiding peak mosquito activity times, Pennsylvanians can reduce their risks of mosquito bites, and possibly being exposed to West Nile Virus,” said DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell. “Avoiding mosquitoes in the great outdoors isn’t always feasible, but protecting yourself and your families from getting bitten can be easy.”

In 2017, 11,900 cases of Lyme disease were recorded in Pennsylvania. Throughout the last several years, the state has consistently recorded one of the highest counts of suspected Lyme disease cases in the U.S.

Blacklegged ticks, also known as deer ticks, are the most common carrier of Lyme disease. Ticks typically thrive in tall grass, brush, and wooded areas, but deer ticks have been found in every county in the state and can live in any habitat. Ticks can infect humans year-round, but are most likely to do so from late spring through the summer months.

“Whether visiting one of our 121 state parks or hiking through our more than 2.2 million acres of state forestland, outdoors enthusiasts must be cognizant of their surroundings,” DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn said. “The administration is committed to educating both our visitors and employees on the best practices, ensuring safe play and work afield.”

State officials noted that the first line of defense against Lyme disease and any other tick-borne illness is to avoid tick-infested habitats, such as areas dense with shrubbery or tall grass. Proper use of personal protective measures such as repellents and protective clothing are also essential when enjoying public lands.

Before heading outdoors, it is important to cover exposed skin, wear lightweight and light-colored clothing (to aid in insect detection) and use an insect repellent containing 20 percent or more DEET.

Once returning home, immediately check yourself, children and pets for ticks. Then, take a shower to remove any ticks that may be attached to your skin. Carefully check your clothing and gear and put them in the dryer on high to kill any ticks.

Symptoms of Lyme disease can include a bull's-eye rash, fever, chills, headache, fatigue, muscle and joint aches, and swollen lymph nodes. It is important to know that someone bit by a tick carrying Lyme disease may not always get a bull's-eye rash.

If you believe you have been bitten by a tick, it is important to speak to a doctor immediately. Antibiotic treatment during the early stages of Lyme disease can help prevent the onset of more severe symptoms. If not treated promptly, Lyme disease may lead to severe health concerns affecting the heart, joints, and nervous system.

West Nile virus is spread by mosquitoes that breed in areas with standing and stagnant water. These areas include urban catch basins, clogged gutters, discarded tires, poorly maintained swimming pools, flower pots, roof gutters, and other containers that hold water.

The Department of Environmental Protection surveys communities affected by West Nile virus each year, and monitors cases of the virus in humans, mosquitoes, birds, and horses.

In 2017, there were 20 human cases of West Nile virus reported in Pennsylvania. So far in 2018, no positive human cases have been reported. Symptoms of West Nile virus are often flu-like and can include a fever, headache, body aches, rash, and swollen lymph nodes, and typically only last a few days.

However, West Nile virus can cause a serious neurological infection, including encephalitis and meningitis. Symptoms of these infections include a severe headache, high fever, muscle weakness, neck stiffness, paralysis, possible confusion and disorientation, tremors, and even a coma.

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