

A Message from the Lower Merion Health Advisory Council

Lower Merion's Township's Health Advisory Council urges all residents to be alert for ticks due to the mild winter and early onset of warm weather. Ticks can carry Lyme disease. In 2011 over 400 cases of Lyme disease were confirmed in Montgomery County, with 28 in Lower Merion Township, making Lyme one of the most common of reportable diseases. Please see the information below from the Montgomery County Health Department. Additional information on Lyme disease prevention and symptoms can be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/Lyme) and the Montgomery County Health Department (montcopa.org)



Lyme Disease is caused by bacteria, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which is transmitted most commonly by the Deer Tick (*Ixodes scapularis*). Lyme disease may cause symptoms affecting the skin, nervous system, heart and/or joints of an individual.

Lyme disease can affect anyone regardless of age, gender or race. People who spend time in grassy and wooded environments are at an increased risk of exposure.

The chances of being bitten by a deer tick are greater between May–October when the ticks are most active. Young deer ticks, called nymphs, are active from mid-May to mid-August and are about the size of poppy seeds. Adult ticks, which are approximately the size of sesame seeds, are most active from March to mid-May and from mid-August to November. Both nymphs and adults can transmit Lyme disease. Lyme disease can even be transmitted in the cold winter months since ticks can be active anytime the temperature is above 45 degrees.

It is important to know that not all deer ticks are infected with the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. Ticks are in fact carriers of the bacteria only after they have fed on small mammals such as rabbits, mice and squirrels. The disease can be spread when an infected tick bites a person and stays attached for an extended period of time. Lyme disease does not spread from one person to another; therefore no prophylaxis is needed for close contacts. Those infected with Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics.

You can protect yourself by following these simple steps when you spend time outdoors:

- Wear light-colored clothing with a tight weave to spot ticks easily.
- Wear enclosed shoes, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. Tuck pant legs into socks or boots and shirt into pants.
- Check clothes and any exposed skin frequently for ticks while outdoors and check again once indoors.
- Consider using insect repellent. Follow label directions.
- Stay on cleared, well-traveled trails. Avoid contacting vegetation.
- Avoid sitting directly on the ground or on stone walls.
- Keep long hair tied back, especially when gardening.