

News Release

For more information, contact Pam Palm,
740-507-6533 or ppalm @knoxhealth.com



11660 Upper Gilchrist Rd. Mount Vernon, OH 43050
PH 740-392-2200 Fax 740-392-9613
www.knoxhealth.com

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Warmer weather means biting insects and increased threat of disease

With the arrival of warmer weather, local residents will be spending more time outside and that means exposure to ticks and mosquitos which can carry harmful diseases. Two of the most prevalent illnesses, West Nile Virus and Lyme disease are common throughout Ohio and the Knox County Health Department urges local residents to take precautions to prevent bites from ticks and mosquitos and avoid the diseases they may carry.

Environmental Health Director Nate Overholt, R.S., said so far this year, residents have brought in 12 ticks for identification, of which nine were black-legged deer ticks. While identification does not confirm that a tick is infected with a disease, identification can alert the person to disease symptoms and what to do if the symptoms occur. Confirmation testing by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is no longer available.

The two most common ticks in Ohio are the American dog tick which causes Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and the black-legged deer tick which causes Lyme disease. The ticks are more easily identified when they are brought in alive and in an enclosed container, said Overholt.

Most diseases in Ohio that are caused by the bite of infected ticks and mosquitos happen between spring and fall when the insects are most active. The most common diseases caused by mosquito bites in Ohio include West Nile virus and La Crosse virus.

Some symptoms of Lyme disease may not appear until weeks, months or years after a tick bite, affecting joints, nervous system and heart. Diagnosis of Lyme disease is based on history of tick exposure, signs and symptoms and is aided by the use of blood tests. Lyme disease responds to appropriate antibiotic therapy. Early detection and treatment will reduce the risk of arthritis and other complications.

“If you develop symptoms following contact with a tick, you should see your doctor,” said Overholt. “Prompt removal of an attached tick will significantly reduce the risk of infection.” If you develop symptoms including fever, flu-like illness or a rash within a few weeks of a tick bite, you should tell your doctor about your tick exposure, advised Overholt. He recommends people record the date of any tick bites in case symptoms occur later.

“Not all ticks are infected with disease, but those that are, must bite and remain attached for hours in order to transmit diseases,” said Overholt. For the black-legged tick, its 36-48 hours; for the dog tick, it’s four to six hours.

Humans are not the only ones affected by the bite of a tick or mosquito. Dogs, cats, and horses can also be affected. Veterinarian Amanda Rogers, DVM, who is also a member of the board of health, noted that she has seen numerous dogs and cats with several attached ticks this year. Symptoms of Lyme disease in dogs include joint pain, fever, and kidney dysfunction; but other dogs remain asymptomatic. Horses can have variable signs when infected with Lyme disease including neurologic and orthopedic changes, as well as uveitis (inflammation in the eye).

“Dogs can be protected from Lyme disease through vaccination that is boosted yearly, and by using year round tick preventions,” said Rogers. “Topical preventions can also be used on horses, but there is currently no labeled vaccine available for this species.”

Mosquitos transmit heartworm disease to dogs and cats. Rogers reported she has diagnosed two local dogs with heartworm disease already this year. Heartworm prevention for dogs and cats needs to be administered year-round to be effective. Rogers said there are a variety of products available to prevent heartworm disease and advised pet owners to discuss with their veterinarian what product is most appropriate for their pet.

The health department plans to start spraying pesticide for mosquitos in June. Spraying will take place in the evenings and early mornings and can be delayed or cancelled due to bad weather conditions including rain, wind or low temperature. The pesticide kills the mosquito larva.

The Knox County Health Department is one of the few health departments in Ohio that still sprays for mosquitos. The pesticide costs around \$11,000 for a 55-gallon drum and is paid for with levy funds. Overholt said he hopes to trap mosquitos this summer in selected areas and then have the trapped mosquitos tested. Referred to as mosquito surveillance, trapping allows for targeted pesticide application in areas where infected mosquitoes are identified. Last summer, mosquitos with West Nile virus were detected in Gambier, Fredericktown and Apple Valley.

The public can also help with mosquito prevention efforts by using insect repellent when outside and getting rid of standing water around their homes. “When it comes to standing water, no amount is too small,” said Overholt. “Mosquitos need just a small amount of water to lay their eggs which hatch in just a day or two.”

Common mosquito habitats include: tires, buckets, cans, bottles, plastic containers, pet food containers and water dishes, planters and pots, including saucers and catch trays. Bird baths should be drained and refilled every 3-4 days.

West Nile Virus (WNV) can cause an infection in humans that can lead to encephalitis. Most people who become infected with WNV do not have any symptoms. About one in five people who become infected develop a fever with other symptoms such as headache, body aches, joint pains, vomiting, diarrhea, or rash. There is no specific treatment for WNV infection, and care is based on symptoms.

Mosquitos are likely to be biting between dusk and dawn. “If you must be outdoors when mosquitos are active, wear repellent with DEET,” advised Overholt. “Cover up by wearing shoes, socks, long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Also, wear light colors. They are less attractive to mosquitos.”

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