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Lyme Disease an Autumn Concern, Too

Amid crisp, autumn days, many people revel in the warmer weather that peeks through from time to time. As the climate continues to change, many areas of the world have witnessed above-average temperatures through the fall and into winter. While this is a boon to outdoor enthusiasts, it can also be a downfall. That's because warm temperatures can also raise the risk of Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is the most common insect-borne ailment in America, indicates research. Roughly 20,000 cases are diagnosed each year, with many others going undetected. Most people know that Lyme disease travels via the deer tick. What many do not know is the disease is found in bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi* that is found in the tick's digestive system. Because deer ticks thrive in warmer weather, says the American Lyme Disease Foundation, the longer the temperature stays above 30 F, the greater the risk for deer tick contact and Lyme disease.

In the spring and summer, deer ticks are in their extremely small nymphal stage. In the autumn they grow into slightly larger adults and can transmit Lyme disease when they attach to unsuspecting pets or people. The female ticks generally are very hungry at this time, attempting to fuel the growth of eggs for the following season.

When the disease is present in the body it can cause a variety of symptoms, most notably a flu-like weariness and a bull's-eye-shaped red rash. Some people do not experience any symptoms, which can be very dangerous. That's because, if left untreated, Lyme disease can cause heart problems, arthritis, meningitis, and inflammation of the brain. The most common course of treatment is antibiotics over a period of weeks or months, depending upon severity.

Keep an Eye Out for Ticks

Because of their small size, deer ticks are often masters of attaching to victims without notice. But there are steps to take to help limit the possibility of contracting ticks.

- Wear light-colored clothing when frequenting areas known to contain ticks. Long pants tucked into socks or boots and long-sleeved shirts are recommended.
- Use a tick repellent spray.

• Inspect all areas of the body, especially behind the knees, behind ears, the neck, and the groin for ticks. They are often attracted to warm areas of the body.

• Avoid tall grass and wooded areas.

• Use a flea and tick repellent on pets so they don't bring ticks into the house.

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