

Lyme Disease and Deer, An Update

Beatrice Szekely, Village of Cayuga Heights Trustee
For the November 2011 Board of Trustees Meeting

Recent reports of cases contracted in the Village and of treatment with antibiotics to prevent it after deer tick bites suggest that this is a good time to review information about the prevalence of Lyme disease in our area.

Locally, citing the Tompkins County Health Department

(<http://www.tompkins-co.org/health/summer/lyme-faq.html>)

- “The tick population in Tompkins County has grown over the last decade.”
- Cases of Lyme disease reported: 9 in 2007; 46 in 2008; 70 in 2010.
- Public health nurse Jeff Moss expects the Public Health Department’s web site to be updated with additional information shortly.

Referencing the New York State Department of Health, Wadsworth Center

(<http://www.wadsworth.org/databank/borreli.html>)

- The bacteria “Borrelia burgdorferi that causes Lyme disease is a spirochete.
- “The reservoirs for the spirochete are the white-footed mouse and the white-tailed deer.”
- “Transmission is accomplished by the bite of infected deer ticks. Contact with the tick usually occurs in the areas of brush and tall grass.”

And turning to the national Lyme Disease Foundation

(<http://www.lyme.org/2010-9.html>)

- Lyme disease accounts for 90% of vector-borne disease cases in the US.
- New York State has had more cases reported than any other state with a total between 1980 and 2010 of 108,728.
- Widespread under reporting is assumed because of difficulty in data collection.

In sum: the health department concluded from a 2008 analysis that 30% of deer ticks in Tompkins County have the *Borrelia burgdorferi* bacteria, an infection rate that is “similar to...the highest rates in New York state.” Lyme disease related to the burgeoning deer population is a serious and growing public health concern.

Of note: One recommended source for research on the positive correlation of the number of white-tailed deer to Lyme disease is the 2007 Tick Management Handbook of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (Bulletin #1010), pp. 52-57, linked on the Village of Cayuga Heights website under Deer Population Control (<http://www.cayuga-heights.ny.us>).

