

# Tick-borne illness cases on the increase

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Tick-borne illness cases on the increase  
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Sun Journal Staff

State public health officials reported this week that the number of cases involving tick-borne illnesses is substantially higher than at the same time last year, and prevention is the key to avoiding them.

"Ticks are part of the ecology of this area and always will be," said Eugene McRoy, vector program manager for the Craven County Health Department. "It's just a matter of doing the best we can to avoid exposure to them."

According to a report from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, Rocky Mountain spotted fever cases are up 106 percent, from 97 to 200, from this year over last. Lyme disease cases are up 30 percent, from 56 to 73.

McRoy said Southern Tick-Associated Rash Illness (STARI) looks very much like Lyme disease. It is also a bacterial infection, but does not result in the same arthritis-like symptoms and long-term health problems that have been associated with Lyme disease. Since Lyme disease can be more serious in older people or those with other health problems, McRoy advises on erring on the side of caution.

"We always recommend tucking in your pant legs, applying products that will actually keep the ticks away," he said.

McRoy said repellants containing permethrin are available for treating clothing. DHHS also recommends repellants containing DEET that can be applied to skin.

Public health officials recommend checking for ticks frequently and removing them quickly, using fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin surface as possible. Use steady, even pressure to remove the tick. Twisting or jerking the tick may cause the mouthparts to break off in the skin.

According to DHHS, if symptoms of tick-borne disease appear within three weeks, medical help should be sought. Symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever include sudden onset of fever, headache and muscle pain, followed by a rash.

Symptoms of Lyme disease include a bull's eye rash around the bite, accompanied by fever, malaise, fatigue, headache, muscle aches and joint pain.

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