

Monmouth County offers tick testing for Lyme disease

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- *From:* "CaliforniaLyme" <CaliforniaLyme@xxxxxx>
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County offers tick testing for Lyme disease

FREEHOLD – County residents who find a tick on themselves or on their children soon will be able to have it tested to see if it is carrying Lyme disease, under a program being launched by the Monmouth County Mosquito Extermination Commission.

The Tick Identification and Tick Testing Service, which will be offered beginning Sept. 1, will bring to residents of Monmouth County the most extensive tick-related information service, available at a single location, in New Jersey. As part of the county's Tick-Borne Disease Program, residents who find a tick will be able to bring it to the Mosquito Extermination Commission's (MCMEC) office in Tinton Falls to have it identified and analyzed for the bacteria that causes Lyme disease.

County residents who suffer from a tick bite can bring it to the MCMEC office in Tinton Falls for identification and testing. The ticks will be taken to the Monmouth County Mosquito Extermination Commission laboratory located at Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, where it will be tested by MCMEC personnel for the presence of Lyme disease. A \$25 fee will be charged to cover the cost of the actual laboratory testing.

There are three common tick types in Monmouth County: the deer tick (black-legged tick), the lone star tick and the American dog tick. Of these, only deer tick females and nymphs play a role in transmitting Lyme disease to humans and pets. Research conducted by the MCMEC in 2000 and 2001 found that about half of all female deer ticks were infected by the Lyme disease bacterium.

"Now, instead of waiting for symptoms to occur and worrying if they have contracted Lyme disease, residents can begin to get information right away by bringing their tick to the Mosquito Commission to be identified and tested. They will know within 24 hours what kind of tick

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it is and within three to nine days whether the tick was infected with Lyme disease," Freeholder William C. Barham said in a press release. "Residents will be able to bring the results of the tick identification and testing with them to their doctors

to be used in diagnosis and treatment

decisions."

The MCMEC will not remove the tick from individuals or offer any medical diagnosis. Rather, ticks can be brought dead or alive to the MCMEC office for identification and testing. The MCMEC specializes in ticks and mosquitoes and the diseases they transmit. Test results will indicate the type of tick, and other useful information about the tick, as well as whether it was infected with the Lyme disease bacterium. Residents can bring these reports to their physician or retain them as part of their medical record. Unfortunately, in addition to Lyme disease, there are other tick-borne diseases in Monmouth County that people and their health-care providers must be aware of.

Since 1990, the MCMEC has played an important role in collaborating on initiatives aimed at reducing the risk of tick-borne diseases in Monmouth County. The Tick-Borne Disease Program was established at the MCMEC as a regional center for tick-borne disease prevention.

The MCMEC successfully spearheaded the legislative initiative to allow county mosquito commissions to assume leadership in tick assessment and management. In 1997, the Board of Freeholders named the MCMEC as the agency to assume those responsibilities.

The number of confirmed cases of Lyme disease in Monmouth County, according to the state Department of Health and Senior Services, has risen steadily over the past three years. In 2002, there were 173 cases, in 2003, there were 220 cases, and last year, there were 242 confirmed cases of Lyme disease in Monmouth County.

Residents who wish to have a tick identified and tested do not have to make an appointment. The MCMEC can be visited Monday through Friday between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Those with a tick to be identified and tested can fill out a form and use the tick submission kit provided at the MCMEC. They will be contacted with the results via telephone as well as provided with a written report. Information regarding ticks and tick-borne diseases can be found on the MCMEC Web site at: www.visitmonmouth.com/mosquito or by calling the MCMEC at (732) 542-3630.

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