

## Lyme Disease Alert

Enjoying the outdoors is great for children and adults. We do have to be aware of the risk of tick-borne diseases such as **Lyme Disease**. This disease occurs throughout NJ from spring to fall but can be prevented through early recognition and treatment.

**Cause of Disease:** Lyme disease is caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is transmitted through the bite of a deer tick. The adult deer tick is about the size of a sesame seed. The female deer tick is dark brown to black in color, with a distinctive brick red abdomen. The male deer tick is even smaller than the female and uniformly dark brown to black. The tick needs to be attached to the skin for 12 to 24 hours before one infected person to another.

**Removal of Ticks:** If a tick is found embedded in the skin, remove it gently, intact and alive, by grasping the tick with tweezers. Do not remove by use of chemicals or burning. Do not crush the tick, as secretions can be infective. After removal, wash area and your hands with soap and water.

**Signs/Symptoms:** A slowly expanding rash beginning as a small red, raised area and eventually growing to 20 inches or more. The rash may have a clear center and be warm to touch. **Not all patients will have a rash.** Other symptoms include flu-like symptoms such as headache, fever, fatigue, muscle aches and nausea. These symptoms appear several days to several weeks after a bite.

**Diagnosis & Treatment:** Blood test, clinical observation, and tick bite history will determine diagnosis. The disease is treatable with antibiotics but best results occur when treated during early stages.

### **Prevention:**

1. Avoid tick infested areas (dense woods and tall weeds).
2. Cut grass and unwanted shrubs which overhang paths.
3. Cover legs, ankles and arms when walking through these areas. Tuck pant legs into socks.
4. Wear light colored clothing in order to notice ticks more easily.
5. Use an insect repellent on exposed skin areas when hiking or camping, being careful to follow directions. (Do not use products with DEET on young children.)
6. Carefully search the entire body for ticks, including the scalp, particularly on children.
7. Put tick collar on pets that go outdoors and check regularly for ticks.
8. Vaccination – *LYMErix* vaccine is now available for people 15-70 years of age. Check with your doctor if you and your family are candidates for the vaccine.