

MID-MICHIGAN

Health department warns of ticks as summer begins

By Morning Sun Staff

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which serves Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties, encourages residents to be on the lookout for ticks.

Gratiot and Montcalm counties are currently in what's called a "potential risk area" because they border counties where Lyme disease is present, according to a news release from the department. This means that blacklegged ticks infected with Lyme disease may be present in Gratiot and Montcalm counties, but have not yet been found.

In Michigan, the number of cases of Lyme disease has increased steadily from 92 in 2008 to more than 330 in 2017, according to a news release from the department.

The blacklegged tick has been reported in 34 of Mich-

igan's 83 counties and continues to spread across the state. Blacklegged ticks were recently found in Clinton County during a routine sweep of the area, and some of those ticks tested positive for Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is transmitted by the blacklegged/deer tick.

Ticks can transmit numerous diseases to people and pets, with Lyme disease being the most common.

Symptoms of Lyme disease include fever, chills, headache, muscle and joint pain, and a bull's-eye rash at the site of the bite. If not properly diagnosed and left untreated, infection can spread to the joints, the heart and the nervous system.

The best defense against Lyme disease is prevention.

If possible, avoid shady, moist areas in woody and

grassy locations, as these are the preferred hiding spots for ticks. If you do need to venture into these areas, walk on well groomed trails and avoid contact with overgrown grass, brush and leaf litter.

Other prevention tips include:

- Applying repellent containing DEET or Picaridin on exposed skin, following manufacturer's instructions;

- Treating clothes (especially pants, socks and shoes) with permethrin, which kills ticks on contact. Do not use permethrin directly on skin;
- Wearing light-colored clothing so ticks are easier to spot;

- Wearing enclosed shoes, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt;

- Tucking pants into socks or boots; and

- Using tick prevention products on your pets.

Upon returning from potentially tick-infested areas,

check yourself and your pets for ticks and shower immediately to wash off and find ticks that may be on you. Ticks can attach to any part of the body, but are commonly found in the hairline, ears, waistline, groin, armpits and sock line.

Prompt removal of a tick is the best way to decrease the chance of infection.

If a tick is found to be attached to skin, use fine-tipped tweezers and grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible.

Slowly and gently pull upward with steady, even pressure.

After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the area and your hands with soap and water and apply an antiseptic to the bite wound.

If the tick is alive after removal, place it in an airtight container with a blade of grass or moistened piece of

paper towel and contact the health department for further instructions.

For Clinton County, call (989) 227-3111; for Gratiot County, call (989) 875-1019, and (989) 831-3615 in Montcalm County.

Testing of the tick may or may not be necessary; the health department will be able to tell you for sure.

Residents can also send electronic photos of ticks to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services for identification by visiting Michigan.gov/lyme for details.

A doctor should be contacted if a fever, rash, or muscle or joint aches are experienced within several weeks of removing a tick.

Patients treated with appropriate antibiotics in the early stages of Lyme disease usually recover quickly and completely.