

HEALTH ALERT

May 1, 2024

POWASSAN VIRUS CONFIRMED IN SHARON RESIDENT

A resident of Sharon, MA has been diagnosed with Powassan Virus – a virus that is transmitted by the Blacklegged Tick (*Ixodes scapularis*). This tick can also transmit Lyme Disease, Babesiosis and Anaplasmosis.

What is Powassan virus?

Powassan Virus is very rare. Most people who are exposed to Powassan virus likely never feel ill, others may become severely ill with meningitis (inflammation of the covering of the brain and spinal cord) or encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).



Blacklegged Tick (*Ixodes scapularis*)

What are the Signs and Symptoms?

Symptoms of disease usually begin between one week and one month after the bite of an infected tick. Signs and symptoms include fever, headache, vomiting, weakness, confusion, loss of coordination, speech difficulties and seizures. Approximately 10% of people with this severe form of the disease will die and survivors may have long-term health problems.

Is there treatment for Powassan virus disease?

There is no specific treatment once infection with Powassan virus has occurred. Treatment consists of supportive care, rest and fluids to prevent dehydration.

What can I do to lower my chances of getting any disease from ticks?

Prevention begins with you!

Please see the below action you can take to prevent tick bites. In addition, your Local Health Department has the following prevention materials on hand for their residents:

- Mosquito, Tick and Insect Repellent Wipes
- TickCheck Tick Removers

Take steps to reduce your chances of being bitten by any tick. Ticks are most active during warm weather, generally late spring through fall. However, ticks can be out any time that temperatures are above freezing. Ticks cling to vegetation and are most numerous in brushy, wooded or grassy habitats. When you are outside in an area likely to have ticks (e.g. brushy, wooded or grassy places), follow these simple steps to protect yourself and your loved ones:



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- Use a repellent with DEET (the chemical N-N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) or permethrin. Repellents containing DEET should not be used on children less than 2 months of age and should be used in concentrations no higher than 30% on older children. Permethrin products are intended for use on items such as clothing, shoes, bed nets and camping gear and should not be applied to skin. Other repellents, such as picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus and IR 3535, have also been found to provide protection against ticks. More information on choosing a repellent and how to use repellents safely is included on the MDPH Public Health Fact Sheet on Tick Repellents at <http://www.mass.gov/dph/tick>.
- Wear long, light-colored pants tucked into socks or boots, and a long-sleeved shirt. This may be tough to do when the weather is hot, but it will help keep ticks away from your skin and help you spot a tick on your clothing faster.
- Stay on trails when walking or hiking, avoiding the edge habitat where ticks are likely to be.
- Showering immediately after potential tick exposure may help remove unattached ticks.
- Talk to your veterinarian about tick control options (tick collars, repellents) for your pets.
- After spending time in an area likely to have ticks, check yourself, your children and pets for ticks. Young ticks, called nymphs, are the size of a poppy seed. Adult black-legged ticks are the size of a sesame seed. Both nymph and adult ticks can spread diseases ticks carry; however, nymphs are often of more concern. They are aggressive feeders and so tiny that it can be difficult to see them on the body, unless you are looking carefully. When doing a tick check, remember that ticks like places that are warm and moist. Always check the back of the knees, armpits, groin, scalp, back of the neck and behind the ears. If you find a tick attached to your body, remove it as soon as possible using fine-point tweezers. Do not squeeze or twist the tick's body, but grasp it close to your skin and pull straight out with steady pressure.

Know the symptoms of tick-borne disease. If you develop symptoms of any disease carried by ticks, see your health care provider right away.