



# KALAMAZOO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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**NEWS RELEASE**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Increased Risk of Lyme Disease in Kalamazoo County**

The Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department wants residents and healthcare providers to be aware of an increasing number of confirmed and probable Lyme disease cases in Kalamazoo County. Currently, Lyme disease cases are five times higher than they were five years ago.

Lyme disease is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is transmitted by the black-legged (deer) tick. It is the most common vector-borne disease in the United States and has been progressively spreading across the State of Michigan. The increase in Lyme disease cases is an indication of a rise in tick activity in the area. Tick exposure can occur year-round, but ticks are most active during warmer months, with the peak season being May through September.

“The number of confirmed and probable Lyme disease cases have increased by 13% compared to the same time last year. We are urging residents to take precautions against tick-borne diseases as we are at the peak tick-borne disease transmission season,” says Mary Franks, Kalamazoo County Epidemiologist.

Health care providers should be familiar with the [clinical manifestations and recommended practices](#) for diagnosing and treating Lyme disease. Typical signs of Lyme disease include flu-like symptoms; however, if left untreated, it may spread to joints, the heart, or the nervous system. The majority of Lyme disease cases can be treated successfully with antibiotics.

Finding and removing ticks within 24 hours can prevent Lyme disease. Persons who have removed attached ticks from themselves, including those who have received antibiotic prophylaxis, should be monitored closely for signs and symptoms of tick-borne diseases for up to 30 days. In particular, they should be monitored for the development of a skin rash at the site of the tick bite. This rash may be solid or have the bull’s-eye appearance. This rash may appear anywhere on the body and may expand gradually over several days.

The Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department’s Environmental Health Division completes field surveillance for ticks by conducting “Tick Drags” along trails and other potential tick habitats to capture and identify them. Black-legged ticks are the target species, but all ticks are of entomological interest. Tick surveillance is combined with mosquito surveillance as part of an ongoing partnership with Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and Michigan State University. With the latest communicable disease incidence data, the frequency of tick drags by the health department is increasing both in number and geographically.

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**HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

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“Kalamazoo County has a known risk for Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases. Taking a few simple preventative measures, including with your dogs and cats, when going outdoors can make a huge difference,” said Franks.

**Before You Go Outdoors:**

- **Know where to expect ticks.** Ticks live in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas, or even on animals.
- **Treat clothing and gear** with products containing 0.5% permethrin or you can buy permethrin-treated clothing and gear. Always follow product instructions. EPA’s helpful [search tool external icon](#) can help you find the product that best suits your needs.
- **Avoid Contact with Ticks.** Avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and walk in the center of trails.

**After You Come Indoors:**

- **Check your clothing for ticks.** Any ticks that are found should be removed. Tumble dry clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to kill ticks on dry clothing after you come indoors.
- **Examine gear and pets.** Ticks can ride into the home on clothing and pets, so carefully examine pets, coats, and daypacks.
- **Check your body for ticks after being outdoors.** Showering within two hours of coming indoors may help wash off unattached ticks, and it is a good opportunity to do a tick check.
- **Check these areas of your body and your child’s body after being outdoors.** Under the arms, in and around the hair and ears, inside the belly button, the waist and back, back of the knees and between the legs and pelvic area.

For additional information about Lyme disease, visit the Centers for Disease Control website at <https://www.cdc.gov/lyme>, or information regarding tick identification and testing, visit [www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases](http://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases).

If you have questions regarding ticks or Lyme disease, please contact the Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department at 269-373-5200.

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