

## **HSE North West Public Health Department Advise on Protection Against Lyme Disease**

The HSE North West Public Health Department advises that people involved in outdoor activities protect themselves against Lyme disease, a bacterial infection spread by bites from infected ticks.

Dr. Fionnuala Cooney, Specialist Registrar in Public Health Medicine, HSE North West says, “Most cases of Lyme disease are mild, but occasionally severe infection can cause heart problems, arthritis or even meningitis. Simple measures that can prevent tick bites include:

- Wearing long trousers tucked into socks, long sleeved tops and closed shoes, not sandals.
- Use insect repellents
- Stick to paths and avoid walking through dense vegetation.

Thankfully only a minority of ticks carry the infection and the risk of infection is low if the tick is removed within a few hours.”

The ticks that carry Lyme disease are common in the countryside, especially in woodlands and grassy areas. The ticks feed on the blood of mammals and birds and will also feed on humans. These ticks are more common and more active during the summer months. The first symptom of Lyme disease is often a rash that can appear 3 to 30 days after the tick bite.

Following outdoor activities in wooded or grassy areas it is advisable that people check their body for ticks. If a tick is found, it should be removed as soon as possible with tweezers (close to the skin) and the area washed with soap and water. The bite site should be checked over the next four weeks for swelling or rash. If symptoms develop, the family doctor should be consulted.

Although the true incidence of Lyme disease is not known in Ireland, it is not a common infection. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre report that it is likely that there are 50 – 100 cases in Ireland every year. Cases of Lyme disease are common in North America and in Northern and Central Europe and visitors on outdoor trips in these areas need to be vigilant for ticks.

More information on Lyme disease, including a useful information leaflet, is available at HPSC website at:

(<http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Vectorborne/LymeDisease>).