

Tick-borne Illness in the Berkshires

Ticks are tiny bugs about the size of a poppy seed or sesame seed, usually found in shady, damp, brushy, wooded, or grassy areas (especially in tall grass), including your own backyard. Ticks feed on the blood of mammals - including people, dogs, cats, deer, and mice - birds, and reptiles. Ticks can bite you and spread diseases like Lyme, babesiosis, human granulocytic anaplasmosis (HGA), human monocytic ehrlichiosis (HME).

Tick-borne illness (Lyme disease, babesiosis, human granulocytic anaplasmosis (HGA), human monocytic ehrlichiosis (HME)) can occur during any time of the year – even the winter. The bacteria that cause these types of tick-borne diseases are spread by infected deer ticks. Young ticks (nymphs) are most active during the warm weather months between May and July. Adult ticks are most active during the fall and spring but may also be out searching for a host any time that winter temperatures are above freezing. Lyme disease is the most reported disease in Berkshire County, with the highest rates among children aged 5-9 years and adults aged 65-69 years. The majority of cases had onsets in June, July, and August. The majority of HGA cases occur from June through August. Due to the limited number of cases reported, knowledge regarding the epidemiology of HME in Massachusetts is incomplete.

In 2013, many people received medical care and were treated for suspected tick borne illness, but Massachusetts Department of Public Health estimates that in Pittsfield and there could be as many as 375-750 cases of Lyme disease which are not reported because lab testing and reporting is not routinely done. Pittsfield had 74 reported confirmed or probable cases of Lyme disease, 5 cases of HGA and 2 cases of babesiosis.