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## Lyme disease increasing: local residents

Steve Goodwin

Two Pictou County residents who have Lyme disease say the disease is becoming more prevalent in the area.

Brenda Sterling-Goodwin of New Glasgow and Ann MacLean of Little Harbour delivered a presentation about the tick-borne disease last Wednesday at the New Glasgow Public Library. Their talk coincides with Lyme Awareness Month in May.

“Lyme is an emerging infectious disease (EID) whose incidence has increased in the past 20 years and threatens to continue increasing in the future,” Sterling-Goodwin says.

The tick surveillance program in Nova Scotia has detected black-legged deer ticks that spread the disease since 2001 according to Jeff Ogden, field entomologist with the Department of Natural Resources.

In 2007 there were ticks collected from all parts of the province. About 400 of the 1,200 collected were shown to be of the black-legged variety that has the potential to carry the Lyme bacteria.

Last year, Ogden said his tick program showed new establishments of black-legged ticks in Pictou County.

“The vector for Lyme is present (in Pictou County), so one would think that the pathogen must be there as well,” Sterling-Goodwin says.

The ticks are found on animals, as well as birds on the Atlantic fly-way that passes over Nova Scotia.

“Ticks are transported and dropped in areas the birds travel; there is no stopping at the borders to check their baggage,” she says. “Not all black-legged ticks carry the bacteria that cause Lyme but there is still a risk of getting Lyme if circumstances are right.”

Many occupations may be at risk, including forestry, farming, veterinarians, construction, landscaping, ground keepers, park or wildlife management, and anyone who either works outside or has contact with animals that may carry the ticks, she says.

Anyone who spends a lot of time outdoors, especially in grassy or wooded areas, may also be at increased risk.

“Education is the key in protecting yourself and your family,” Sterling-Goodwin says.



Pictou County residents Brenda Sterling Goodwin, left, and Ann MacLean discuss information about Lyme disease during their address last Wednesday at the New Glasgow Public Library. (Goodwin photo)

Ticks attach themselves to their host after crawling up a blade of grass or other vegetation. The tick secretes a cement-like substance, as well as an anesthetic when attaching.

Global warming is affecting the tick populations, which can be found anytime of the year. Precautions such as headwear, full shoes or boots, light-coloured long pants and long-sleeve shirts are recommended, as well as walking in the middle of trails, away from tall grass and bushes, and in cleared areas.

There are tick removal devices available through veterinary offices and outdoor wilderness stores. They can be sent to the Department of Natural Resources for testing for Lyme disease. Lyme disease can be easily treated with antibiotic if caught early.