



TOWN OF AQUINNAH BOARD OF HEALTH

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The MV Tick Program and tick-borne diseases

There are 13 reported cases of tick-borne disease in Aquinnah from last April to date. There are cases of Lyme, Ehrlichiosis, Babesiosis and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Do not wait to seek diagnosis and medical treatment; the sooner a tick-borne disease is treated, the better the recovery. For more information about ticks and disease prevention visit: dukescounty.org/mv-tick-program

The following information is from Richard Johnson of The Dukes County MV Tick Program:

Lone Star Tick Larvae

We have been receiving numerous reports of people being bitten by what are almost certainly larvae of the lone star tick. Most of these reports have come from Aquinnah, Chilmark and Chappaquiddick, but lone star ticks have been found in every town on the Island.

The larvae hatch from the eggs from mid-summer through September and probably into October. Unlike deer ticks, the larvae do not disperse but hang onto the vegetation in a ball of thousands of tiny, pin head size ticks. When a person or other animal brushes against the vegetation the ticks quickly latch on, often hundreds at a time. Many bite right away, resulting in a rash consisting of dozens to hundreds of small red dots on the ankles and calves. Others move very quickly upward, so people often end up with multiple bites on their upper legs, back and torso as well. These bites tend to be extremely itchy and the intense discomfort may last for over a month.

Since the larvae have not fed it is unlikely that they will transmit any diseases. However, it has been reported that the larvae can cause the "red meat allergy", aka the alpha gal syndrome. Some people who are bitten by lone star ticks develop an allergy to mammal meat and sometimes even dairy products. Symptoms may be as mild as a rash or upset stomach, but some people have gone into anaphylactic shock. Symptoms often do not appear until 5 or 6 hours after a meal, many times only after the person has gone to bed.

A coalition of individuals and Island non-profits, led by the Dukes County and the Boards of Health of all six Island Towns is working to reduce or eliminate lone star ticks and the problems they cause. However, this is a difficult, long term undertaking, so for now it is imperative that people take protective measures such as wearing clothing treated with permethrin or using 30% Deet on bare skin. For more information on ticks and personal protective measures please visit mvboh.com or email Dick Johnson at mvticks@gmail.com.