

JULY

SOBELUTIONS

2014

NEW, DEADLY TICK-BORNE VIRUS

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Just when you thought it was safe to go into the woods with only Lyme's Disease to worry about, there's another even more onerous tick-borne disease to be concerned about.

Powassan Virus (POW) is related to the West Nile, St. Louis encephalitis, and Tick-Borne encephalitis viruses. Humans become infected with POW from the bite of an infected tick. Small rodents, such as squirrels, woodchucks, and white footed mouse may be some of the carriers.

Symptoms:

- Many people who become infected do not develop any symptoms
- Incubation period ranges from about one week to one month
- POW can infect the central nervous system and cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), and meningitis (inflammation of membrane around the spinal cord and brain)
- Fever, headaches, vomiting, weakness, confusion, loss of coordination, speech difficulties, and seizures
- **APPROXIMATELY HALF OF SURVIVORS HAVE PERMANENT NEUROLOGICAL SYMPTOMS**, such as headaches, muscle loss, and memory problems
- **UNLIKE LYME'S DISEASE, APPROXIMATELY 10% of POW virus encephalitis cases ARE FATAL**

There currently are no vaccines to treat this virus or prevent its infection. Persons with severe POW illnesses often require hospitalization, respiratory support, intravenous fluids, and medications to reduce swelling in the brain.

The 'good news,' is that up until now, there have been relatively few cases reported, and they have been primarily limited to the Northeast and Great Lakes regions. They occur mostly in the late spring, early summer and mid-fall when ticks are most active.

Reducing exposure to ticks is the best defense against POW.

- Avoid contact with ticks. As much as possible avoid wooded areas, bushy areas, and high grass areas
- Apply insect repellent
- Look for ticks on campers often and remove them immediately
- Check clothing and, athletic or other gear

The chances of POW being fatal, is just one area of concern. A Poughkeepsie, NY teen died of the virus last August.

Lyme's Disease typically takes several hours or days before the tick attacks the host. The POW virus can be transmitted if the tick latches on for just 15 minutes. And all signs point to the continued and outward spread of the virus carrying ticks.

Be sure to alert your Health Center staff.

Inform your counselors of this new tick-borne virus and direct them to be even more vigilant in looking for ticks on campers and themselves, on a routine basis.

For more information, talk to your camp Physician or visit any number of helpful websites, including the Center for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/powassan

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