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In the fight against Lyme disease, your dryer is your best friend  
by Elisa Adams · Friday, June 25, 2010

“When you come in from the woods or garden,” Kurt Hayes told the group of residents gathered at the library June 17 to hear his presentation on Lyme disease, “put your clothes in the dryer, and run it for 20 minutes.” He explained, “Ticks hate two things—hot and dry—and the dryer has both. They have been known to survive a cycle in the washing machine, but they can’t survive 20 minutes in the dryer.”

Boxborough resident Hayes is co-founder of [LymeLITE.org](http://LymeLITE.org) with Groton resident Donna Castle. The two were in Harvard to offer practical tips on the prevention of Lyme disease in a “Stop Lyme disease!” education and awareness forum sponsored by the Harvard Board of Health.

According to Hayes, Harvard and surrounding towns have Lyme disease incidence rates that are among the highest in Massachusetts and the nation. Harvard specifically has more than double the Lyme disease cases per capita than occur on Cape Cod, Martha’s Vineyard, and Nantucket, he said, adding, “The Lyme epidemic isn’t coming to our area, it’s already here and you need to take steps to protect your family.”

Among the other tips Hayes offered was to separate the family lawn from nearby tick-friendly woods or meadowland with a wide barrier of large stones. “The stones get hot in the sun, and ticks won’t cross hot rocks to get onto your lawn.”

Hayes also encouraged his audience to invest in high white socks. “Tuck your pants into the socks and check them regularly for climbing ticks. They’re not stylish, but your best strategy is to spot the ticks before they reach your skin. When you get into the house, have someone you live with check your back and scalp, places where you can’t check yourself,” he also urged.

“If you find a tick that is attached,” Hayes directed, “use tweezers and just get it off. If part of the mouth is left in the skin, clean it with alcohol, but remember, the spirochete is in the body of the deer tick, not in the mouth. Time is of the essence. The longer the tick stays attached, the more spirochetes will migrate into your bloodstream. Hold the tweezers as close to the skin as possible, and just get it off.”

Hayes’ own experience with Lyme disease began two years ago, when his son Justin began developing strange neurological symptoms. His pediatrician, and then a series of specialists, tested Justin for a wide variety of dreaded diseases. Finally, a knowledgeable Boston specialist looked at the pattern of symptoms and said, “I think this is Lyme disease.” Twenty-eight days on antibiotics cleared up all the symptoms and left Hayes asking himself, why did this take three months? Why didn’t the other doctors suspect Lyme disease sooner?

The spirochete bacterium that causes Lyme disease was discovered in 1981. Shaped like a corkscrew, it does not merely float in the blood stream; it invades tissue. “It goes after heart, brain, collagen, and joints,” Hayes said. “Another spirochete infectious disease,” Hayes informed the group, “is syphilis.”

Since 1981 a battle has been raging in the medical community to decide how long Lyme disease should be treated and when to determine the patient is cured. Current doctrine states that a 28-day round of antibiotics should “cure” Lyme disease, but if Lyme goes untreated for weeks or months while other diagnoses are explored, 30 days is likely not enough.

Governor Deval Patrick has a bill currently pending on his desk designed to protect doctors who treat Lyme patients from being harassed by local medical boards who state they are “overtreating” their patients. This bill, House Bill 1148, has been passed by the Massachusetts House and Senate, and needs Patrick’s signature. “Please help us get the bill passed,” Hayes urged his audience.

More information is available at a number of websites, including [LymeLITE.org](http://LymeLITE.org) and [tickedoffMass.com](http://tickedoffMass.com).