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To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

Rare Tick-borne infections diagnosed in UK (Warning):

What you need to know about 'Tick-borne' diseases (TBDs):

- Several diseases are carried by UK Ticks.
- Lyme disease is by far the most common.
- Cases of other Tick-borne diseases have now been officially reported in the UK.
- Symptoms of these diseases overlap those of Lyme disease.
- Most are treated with the same antibiotics as for Lyme disease.
- Early diagnosis is very important!

For a summary of the latest news on TBDs see below.

Public Health England (PHE) has called for people to be 'Tick-Aware' as the first case of Babesiosis is diagnosed in the UK.

Public Health England has confirmed the diagnosis of a case of Babesiosis and a case of Tick-borne Encephalitis (TBE) in UK. This is the first record of a UK-acquired case of Babesiosis and the second case of TBE being acquired in the UK.

Babesiosis is caused by a parasite which infects red blood cells whilst TBE is a viral infection that affects the central nervous system. Both are rare infections spread by the bite from an infected Tick.

Both patients have been transferred to hospital, where they are receiving appropriate treatment and supportive care.

PHE regularly undertakes work to understand the potential risks of Tick-borne infections in England. This year, PHE has been undertaking surveys of various sites in Devon close to where the person with Babesiosis lives, collecting and testing hundreds of Ticks.

PHE has tested deer blood samples from Hampshire in areas near to where the person with probable TBE lives and they have shown evidence of likely TBE virus infection, which matches similar results found in 2019 surveys.

The risk of Babesiosis or TBE for the general public is remains low. However, a number of infections can develop following a Tick bite, including Lyme disease, and there are things people can all do to reduce the risk of being bitten by Ticks while either working or enjoying the outdoors during the summer.

It is important to be 'Tick Aware' and take precautions to reduce the risk of being bitten by Ticks when in green spaces this summer including:

- Keeping to footpaths and avoiding long grass.
- Wearing appropriate clothing such as a long-sleeved shirt, and trousers tucked into socks/boots making it less likely that a Tick will bite and attach itself.
- Considering the use of repellents containing DEET.
- Making it a habit to carry out a Tick check regularly when outdoors and after returning home.
- If bitten by a Tick, it should be removed as soon as possible using fine, pointed, tipped tweezers or a tick removal tool which is sold by many outdoor stores, vets and pharmacies. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull upwards slowly and firmly. Once removed, the skin should be washed with water and soap, and an antiseptic cream applied to the skin around the bite.
- Tick bite victims should contact their GP promptly if they begin to feel unwell, remembering to tell the GP about being bitten by a Tick and having recently spent time outdoors.

PHE state that presently cases of Babesiosis and TBE in England are rare and the risk of being infected remains low. However, Lyme disease remains the most common Tick-borne infection in England.

Ticks are most active between spring and autumn, so it is sensible to take some precautions to avoid being bitten when working or enjoying leisure time outdoors.

Individuals should always seek medical advice if starting to feel unwell after a Tick bite.

Babesiosis

Most people with Babesiosis will have either no symptoms or mild symptoms of infection; people with weakened immune systems can become very ill and present with flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, muscle ache, fatigue, and jaundice.

Tick-Borne Encephalitis (TBE)

Around two-thirds of people with TBE infections will have no symptoms. For those who develop symptoms, there are often two phases. The first is associated with flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache and fatigue. This can then progress to a more serious second phase that involves the central nervous system, which can lead to Meningitis, Encephalitis and paralysis.

Individuals developing flu-like symptoms after being bitten by a tick should visit their GP or go to hospital if they:-

- get a stiff neck and a severe headache
- get pain when looking at bright lights
- have a seizure (fit)
- have a change in behaviour – such as sudden confusion
- develop weakness or loss of movement in part of the body

Lyme Disease

Several diseases are carried by UK Ticks. Lyme disease is by far the most common.

Many people with early symptoms of Lyme disease develop a circular red skin rash around a tick bite.

Some people also have flu-like symptoms in the early stages, such as:

- a high temperature, or feeling hot and shivery
- headaches
- muscle and joint pain
- tiredness and loss of energy

See a GP if:

- you have been bitten by a Tick or visited an area in the past month where infected Ticks are found **and** you get:-
- flu-like symptoms – such as feeling hot and shivery, headaches, aching muscles or feeling sick, or
- a circular red rash
- tell them if you have been in forests or grassy areas

What you need to know about tick-borne diseases (TBDs):

- Several diseases are carried by UK Ticks.
- Lyme disease is by far the most common.
- Very few cases of other TBDs have been officially reported in the UK.
- Symptoms of these diseases overlap those of Lyme disease.
- Most are treated with the same antibiotics as for Lyme disease.
- **Other TBDs** not mentioned above are **Rickettsiosis**: It can cause a spotty rash, fevers and sometimes a black 'eschar', or scab, at the site of the Tick bite. Positive blood tests have been recorded in UK patients. Rickettsia infections respond to the same treatment as for Lyme disease. **Borrelia Miyamotoi** causes a Lyme-like illness but without an EM rash and with more fever (sometimes coming and going) and headache. In some cases Meningitis develops. There have been no reported UK cases yet. **Louping Ill Virus** is endemic to UK upland areas and causes a severe infection of the central nervous system. It is common in sheep, grouse and other animals. Human cases are rare. All these except Louping Ill are more common in mainland Europe. North America has a different spectrum of Tick-borne diseases as well as different Ticks so American information cannot be extrapolated to the UK.

Covid-19/Coronavirus v Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is a tiny risk compared with Covid-19 – on average only about 10% of UK Ticks carry it, and it gives rise to perhaps 10,000 cases per year in the UK, though precise numbers are not known. Unlike the Covid-19 (Virus), Lyme disease is a bacterial infection and when recognised early it can be treated with antibiotics.

Footnote:

The CWU Health, Safety & Environment Department has continued to work with and support UK charities striving to raise awareness about Tick-bite risks and for the prevention and treatment of Lyme disease and associated Tick-borne diseases after a small number of CWU

members fell victim to Tick bites and Tick-borne diseases some years ago and those members requested our support. Awareness of Ticks is the key and will help CWU members, their families, friends and colleagues avoid these nasty illnesses, pain and suffering plus not adding to the NHS burden.

Attachments:

- LDA Leaflet on Ticks in Britain
- LDA Leaflet on Tick-Borne Diseases

Yours sincerely



Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer