

## Ticks a Threat Year-Round

How to outsmart them  
and avoid disease

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JAMES CARBONE

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HOWARD SCHNAPP

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# ★ Hamas reviewing cease-fire plan

The Associated Press

CAIRO — Hamas said Saturday it was reviewing a new Israeli proposal for a cease-fire in Gaza, as Egypt intensified efforts to broker a deal to end the monthslong war and stave off a planned Israeli ground offensive into the southern city of Rafah.

Senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya gave no details of Israel's offer, but said it was in response to a Hamas proposal two weeks ago. Negotiations earlier this month centered on a six-week cease-fire proposal and the release of 40 civilian and sick hostages in exchange for freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

A separate Hamas statement said leaders from the three main militant groups active in Gaza discussed attempts to end the war. It didn't mention the Israeli proposal.

The statements came hours after an Egyptian delegation ended a visit to Israel, where it discussed a "new vision" for a prolonged cease-fire in Gaza, according to an Egyptian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to freely discuss the developments.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Israel's proposal was directly related to the visit.

The discussions between Egyptian and Israeli officials focused on the first stage of a plan that would include a limited exchange of hostages held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners, and the return of a significant number of displaced Palestinians to their homes in northern Gaza "with minimum restrictions," the Egyptian official said.

Mediators are working on a compromise that will answer most of both parties' main demands, which could pave the way to continued negotiations with the goal of a deal to end the war, the official said.

Hamas has said it won't back down from demands for a permanent cease-fire and full withdrawal of Israeli



A demonstration in Israel by supporters, relatives of people taken by Hamas militants.

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES / JACK GUEZ

troops. Israel has rejected both and said it will continue military operations until Hamas is defeated and that it will retain a security presence in Gaza.

There is growing international pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach a cease-fire deal and avert an Israeli attack on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people have sought refuge.

Israel has insisted for months it plans a ground offensive into Rafah, on the border with Egypt, where it says many remaining Hamas militants remain, despite calls for restraint including from Israel's staunchest ally, the United States.

Egypt has cautioned an offensive into Rafah could have "catastrophic consequences" on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, where famine is feared, and on regional peace and security.

The Israeli military has massed dozens of tanks and armored vehicles in southern Israel close to Rafah and hit locations in the city in near-daily airstrikes.

Early Saturday, an airstrike hit a house in Rafah's Tel Sultan neighborhood, killing a man, his wife and their sons, ages 12, 10 and 8, according to records of the Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital's morgue.

# TICKS ALWAYS HERE,

Experts: Take care to avoid bites and illnesses they bring

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

BY LISA L. COLANGELO  
lisa.colangelo@newsday.com

Summer on Long Island means sun, surf, sand — and ticks.

The increasingly warm winters have made the voracious, tiny critters — which can carry a number of diseases — a year-round problem. But they become even more frisky in the warm months. Experts are warning people, especially those visiting Long Island's parks and beaches in the coming weeks, to take precautions.

Every year yields more information about ticks and the illnesses they cause. Clinicians said treatment should be based on symptoms and that a new surveillance criteria for Lyme disease may create a more accurate baseline for cases. And testing for Lyme disease isn't always needed.

Researchers are also learning that Black people may be diagnosed with Lyme disease at a much later stage because their symptoms, including the rash, are not always immediately recognized.

"Ticks are very adaptive arthropods," said Anna-Marie Wellins, a doctor of nursing practice who works at Stony Brook Southampton Hospital's Regional Tick-Borne Disease Resource Center in Hampton Bays, which opened last summer. "But we can outsmart them through education and prevention."

## Tracking ticks

Long Island is one of the epicenters for Lyme disease and a hotbed for ticks. But instead of trying to determine the tick population in Nassau and Suffolk counties, scientists focus on testing for viruses the ticks carry that can cause diseases such as babesiosis, anaplasmosis, powassan virus disease and a version of Rocky Mountain spotted fever — as well as Lyme disease.



Anna-Marie Wellins, a doctor of nursing practice at Stony Brook medicine, said we can "outsmart" ticks with education, prevention.

STONY BROOK SOUTHAMPTON HOSPITAL

## How to avoid ticks

### ■ Check yourself every day.

Ticks like skin folds such as under the arms, behind the knees, inside the belly button and around the waist. Children should be checked thoroughly as well.

■ **When going outdoors**, pull socks up over pant legs and tuck in shirts. Wearing light-colored clothing can help spot ticks. Use insect repellent but make sure to follow product instructions.

■ **Shower as soon as possible** after being outdoors. Throw items of clothing in a hot dryer before washing them.

■ **Talk to your veterinarian** about protecting dogs and cats with treatments.

## What to do if bitten by a tick

■ **Use tweezers** to remove the tick by grabbing its head. You may want to save the tick in a small container or bag for identification purposes.

■ **Use rubbing alcohol** or soap and water to disinfect the tick bite area.

■ **Monitor your health** and contact your doctor if you develop a rash, fever, aches, fatigue or swollen joints.

SOURCE: The Regional Tick-Borne Disease Resource Center at Stony Brook Southampton Hospital

Wellins said, in general, about 20% of nymph (young) ticks carry some kind of pathogen, and 50% of adult ticks do.

The Suffolk County Health Department collects ticks at 10 different locations, one in each township, and tests them. In 2023, the majority of ticks tested positive for the bacteria that causes Lyme disease. The results ranged from 26% of adult ticks tested from Riverhead to 44% in Babylon, 50% in Smithtown and 70% on Shelter Island.

Nassau County does not conduct tick surveillance. But results from the 2023 Tick Blitz, a citizen science project operated by the Northeast Regional

Center for Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases, led by Cornell University's Department of Entomology, showed most of the ticks collected were blacklegged ticks from the central and northern parts of Nassau.

"I have only been out once in Suffolk County to look for ticks, and I found a variety of species and life stages," said Jody Gangloff-Kaufmann, senior extension associate and entomologist for New York's Integrated Pest Management program at Cornell University. "Ticks are very active right now ... Nassau County is no exception, although ticks tend to be in the greener spaces in the middle of the Island and north

# BUT WORSE IN WARM WEATHER



Recovered ticks from a wooded area in Calverton. Warmer weather has made ticks a year-round issue.



Dr. Andrew Handel treats those with tick-borne diseases.

into the preserves and parks.”

## Counting Lyme cases

Some experts believed for years that cases of Lyme disease were underreported because people didn't have symptoms, didn't seek treatment or there was not enough medical evidence to support a diagnosis.

In 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention changed the way cases of Lyme disease are reported, leading to a shocking rise in statistics. In 2022, 62,551 cases were reported to the CDC compared with an average 37,118 cases annually between 2017 and 2019.

A CDC study concluded the

rise was from the reporting change, not from an increase in the risk of disease.

“In our areas and others where there's a higher incidence of Lyme disease, they will now base their estimates on the number of positive lab results,” said Dr. Andrew Handel, a pediatric infectious diseases expert at Stony Brook Children's Hospital who treats patients with tick-borne diseases. “But once you are positive for Lyme disease, you can have a positive test for years, so doing it just based on lab tests doesn't always tell you if someone really has Lyme disease.”

Handel said if someone is bitten by a tick but doesn't have symptoms such as the bull's-eye rash, fever, joint aches, fatigue and brain fog, they don't necessarily need to be tested.

“A lot of parents come in and they really want to have Lyme disease testing done after every tick bite their kids had,” he said. “It's a tough situation because I understand wanting to make sure they don't have Lyme disease, but it can open the door to a lot of confusion. It's common to have these antibodies, but you

may not be sick or have an infection.”

Tests also cannot be performed until about two or three weeks after a bite because it searches for antibodies, not the bacteria that causes Lyme.

Instead, Handel said people need to focus on the rash that accompanies a bite and immediate or developing symptoms. In some cases, people who have been bitten will receive a dose of an antibiotic for prevention as they continue to monitor for symptoms.

## A late diagnosis

Researchers are finding it takes longer for people with darker skin to be diagnosed with Lyme disease. A recent study from the Johns Hopkins Medicine Lyme Disease Research Center shows Black patients were more likely to have advanced stages of Lyme disease and experience delays in getting antibiotic treatment.

Researchers said there was a lack of community and physician awareness. Also, the way rashes appear on darker skin is less likely to be seen in textbooks.

Later diagnoses could mean

people developing more serious symptoms, including severe fatigue and irregular heartbeat. “They are underdiagnosed and the early cases are missed,” Handel said. “It's a real problem.”

He said he is working with staff at the hospital to conduct a survey to focus on the issue.

## Ticks to watch

Gangloff-Kaufmann said the spread of invasive Asian longhorned ticks, which have been found on pets, livestock, wildlife and people, continues across Long Island since they were first discovered in the United States in 2017.

The CDC said one study found this tick is not likely to spread Lyme disease, but research is ongoing. Another

study found it can spread the bacteria that causes Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

The female ticks can lay eggs and produce more female ticks without mating.

“This allows these ticks to quickly develop large populations where they find hosts,” including deer, opossum and raccoons, Gangloff-Kaufmann said. “They are not fond of people, but we should keep in mind our pets and make sure they are protected.”

The Gulf Coast tick also has made its way to Long Island from the southeastern United States. It can transmit a form of spotted fever to humans, according to the CDC.

“We don't fully know what their consequence will be,” Gangloff-Kaufmann said.

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