



N/O

9/11 Illness: 12,161 From FDNY Diagnosed

A5

'THE TICKS ARE WINNING'

Lyme disease cases jump roughly 16% in NYS,
and other tick-borne illnesses also on rise,
state health commissioner says

A3 | [UPDATES AT NEWSDAY.COM](#)



Shinnecock Powwow's Milestone

EXPLORE LI

Vials of ticks at
the Stony Brook
Southampton
Hospital's Regional
Tick-Borne Disease
Resource Center.



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2,200 NYS ARRESTS IN AUGUST ICE SWEEP, FEDS SAY A2

Danger of ticks on rise

Lyme disease, alpha-gal cases soar on LI, in NY

BY LISA L. COLANGELO

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In the latest sign of the daunting public health challenge ticks pose to Long Island, Lyme disease cases in New York increased almost 16% last year compared with 2024, according to preliminary figures Dr. James McDonald, state health commissioner, gave Tuesday while visiting a tick-borne disease clinic in Hampton Bays.

McDonald said cases of other tick-borne diseases are also on the rise.

"I think it's safe to say the ticks are winning," he said during a news conference outside the Stony Brook Southampton Hospital's Regional Tick-Borne Disease Resource Center and Clinic. "We are in a time where we have to think differently about ticks. They're no longer just a nuisance, but ticks really are a rising threat."

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection with symptoms ranging from a rash to a headache, fever and fatigue. Early treatment with antibiotics can reduce symptoms. In more serious cases, it can cause arthritis, neck stiffness, facial palsy and swelling of the brain and spinal cord.

McDonald said there were approximately 25,000 Lyme disease cases in the state, including 22,000 outside of New York City. County figures weren't immediately available. Last year's number of cases is preliminary, according to state Health Department spokeswoman Marissa Crary. More precise figures were not available Tuesday.

Statistics published by the state show there were 21,632 cases statewide in 2024, 21,466 in 2023 and 16,117 in 2022. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other public health agencies, including New York's, updated how they counted cases in 2022.

McDonald visited Suffolk County — an epicenter for tick-borne diseases and home to a large and active tick popu-



NYS Health Commissioner Dr. James McDonald talks about the public health challenges posed by ticks in Hampton Bays Tuesday.

lation — to meet with doctors and scientists who collect and examine ticks, provide treatment and perform research on Long Island.

Rise in alpha-gal syndrome

Besides Lyme disease, Long Island has seen more reported cases of the red meat allergy known as alpha-gal syndrome, and other tick-borne illnesses, such as rabbit fever and babesiosis. The tick population this year has been aided by a growing deer population and last winter's heavy snow, which gave them a layer of protection from freezing temperatures, according to entomologists. Additionally, the more aggressive lone star tick has seemingly become more prevalent than the blacklegged tick, commonly known as a deer tick. Deer ticks can transmit Lyme disease, while lone star ticks most commonly can trigger alpha-gal syndrome.

The state plans to start keeping statistics on alpha-gal cases — a difficult task since not everyone with a positive blood test for alpha-gal develops an al-

WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

- **Lyme disease cases increased in New York** last year, with a preliminary count of 25,000 in 2025, according to New York State Health Commissioner Dr. James McDonald.
- **McDonald visited Stony Brook's tick-disease clinic** in Hampton Bays on Tuesday to remind people that tick season continues into the fall and discuss the growth in tick-borne diseases.
- **He encouraged residents to focus** on personal protection against ticks by using repellents, avoiding tick-infested areas, performing tick checks regularly and keeping grass around their homes short and less tick-friendly.

lergy to red meat, dairy and other products made from cows, pigs, lambs and goats. By looking at those results, plus examining claims from public and private health insurance companies, the state will get a better idea of how prevalent the allergy is, he said.

Alpha-gal cases are "rising in New York State, mostly on Long Island, but we're nowhere near what's going on in other states like Arkansas, Missouri and other parts of the Midwest," he said.

Advocates for increased research and funding on alpha-

gal have said 13 states currently have reporting requirements for alpha-gal syndrome.

Entering 'peak period'

McDonald also emphasized the need for personal protection as the fall season approaches, displaying a can of insect repellent he carries.

Dr. Andrew Handel, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at Stony Brook Children's Hospital, said there is a "dangerous misconception" that tick risks disappear as the summer winds down.

"Autumn is a peak period for

tick activity," he said. "They remain highly active and on the lookout for their next meal."

Handel recommended nightly head-to-toe tick checks for children.

In the fall, clusters of larval lone star ticks emerge from egg clusters and can produce a "very itchy bite," said Scott Campbell, an entomologist and chief of the Arthropod-borne Disease Lab at the Suffolk County Department of Health.

"And there's usually many of them," he said.

Most lone star ticks at that age stage don't carry any viruses or bacteria that can cause disease in humans but their saliva could still cause the alpha-gal allergy in some people.

"In October, the blacklegged adults will come out and they will be active all winter long when it's above 40 degrees," Campbell said.

McDonald said people should not fear the outdoors, but just be prepared for it.

"Although the ticks are winning, we live here, too," he said. "And we aren't giving up."

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