



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ticks in Illinois Found to Have Heartland Virus

Protect yourself from tick bites

SPRINGFIELD – Last summer, a Kankakee County resident tested positive for Heartland virus, the first case reported in Illinois. In response to this human case, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) collaborated with the Illinois Natural History Survey Medical Entomology Laboratory (INHS MEL) and Kankakee County Health Department to conduct the first environmental health investigation to a novel tickborne disease case. Ticks were collected from the area and sent to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for Heartland virus testing. Heartland virus was detected in Lone Star ticks collected from Kankakee County.

“Bites from Ticks can result in multiple types of infections, which can cause serious illness in some people,” said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. “It is important to take precautions and protect yourself from tick bites by using insect repellent and checking regularly for ticks when in wooded areas or high grass.”

Heartland virus was first identified in 2009 when two Missouri farmers who had been bitten by ticks were admitted to a hospital. Heartland virus is a viral disease that can be spread to people through the bite of an infected Lone Star tick. Reported cases of Heartland virus disease are relatively rare, however almost all individuals with Heartland virus have been hospitalized. Although most people infected have fully recovered, a few have died. There are no vaccines to prevent Heartland virus infections.

Signs and symptoms of infection are similar to those of other tickborne diseases and can include fever, headaches, fatigue, muscle aches, and diarrhea. Most people have reported becoming sick about two weeks after being bit by a tick. And while there is no treatment, doctors can treat some of the symptoms. If you have been bitten by a tick and think you may have Heartland virus or another tickborne illness, visit a health care provider. Other tickborne illnesses Illinois residents have been diagnosed with include Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Ehrlichiosis, and tularemia. Health care providers should consider Heartland virus in patients who have compatible symptoms and are not responding to other treatments.

Ticks are commonly found on the tips of grasses and shrubs. Lone Star ticks are found throughout Illinois. Ticks crawl—they cannot fly or jump. The tick will wait on the grass or shrub for a person or animal to walk by and then quickly climb aboard. Some ticks will attach

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quickly and others will wander, looking for places like the ear, or other areas where the skin is thinner.

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Simple tips to avoid tick bites include:

- Wear light-colored, protective clothing—long-sleeved shirts, pants, boots or sturdy shoes, and a head covering. Treat clothing with products containing 0.5 percent permethrin.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE). For assistance selecting the appropriate insect repellent, see EPA's helpful search tool.
- Walk in the center of trails so grass, shrubs, and weeds do not brush against you.
- Check yourself, children, other family members, and pets for ticks every two to three hours.
- Remove any tick promptly by grasping it with tweezers, as close to the skin as possible and gently, but firmly, pulling it straight out. Wash your hands and the tick bite site with soap and water.

Additional information about [ticks](#) can be found on the [IDPH website](#). A [map](#) of the geographical location of Heartland virus cases is also available on the CDC website.

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