

Lyme Disease in North Carolina
North Carolina Division of Public Health Position Statement
July 2, 2004

Background

Lyme Disease is the common name for the tickborne infection caused by the spirochete bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and related species. Lyme Disease is a reportable condition in North Carolina and is part of the Nationally Notifiable Disease Surveillance System. Lyme Disease is an emerging infectious disease in that it is an epizootic capable of transmission to humans and is caused by a recently discovered pathogen. As such, the scientific knowledge of Lyme Disease, including its epidemiology and the clinical spectrum of disease, is changing.

Case Reporting

While Lyme Disease is more prevalent in other parts of the country, cases have been identified in NC. CDPH recognizes the protean clinical manifestations of Lyme Disease. Nevertheless, CDPH, as all other state health departments, must use only established case definitions (Figure 1) for the purposes of surveillance. In particular, the Communicable Disease rule in the NC Administrative Code (10A NCAC 41 A. 0201, Control Measures General) states that "guidelines and recommendations published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shall supercede those contained in the Control of Communicable Disease Manual and are likewise incorporated by reference". Thus NCDPH must use current CDC case definitions for all reportable communicable diseases.

NCDPH acknowledges that there are people who suffer from chronic symptoms that resemble some of the manifestations of late Lyme Disease. However, if these people lack measurable antibody to Lyme Disease (Figure 1), they do not meet the national case definition criteria for surveillance and therefore cannot be counted as cases for the purposes of surveillance. NCDPH cannot accept non-FDA approved laboratory tests as laboratory confirmation of Lyme Disease. Also, anecdotal reports of people not fulfilling case definition (Figure 1) but who have responded to long courses of antibiotics (with activity against *B. burgdorferi* and many other bacteria) will not be considered cases of Lyme Disease.

Research

CDPH supports the need for further research of Lyme Disease as an emerging infectious disease. Particular areas in need of study are the ecology in the southern United States, the clinical spectrum of disease and its pathogenesis, and clinical therapeutic trials. CDPH will seek research opportunities and foster collaboration with academic and private practice clinical research centers. In an era of limited resources, however, NCDPH realizes there are competing public health needs that have higher priority. Public health priorities are based on scientific studies published in peer-reviewed literature and consensus statements by national experts.

Prevention

NCDPH has a mission of disease prevention and will continue to issue and strengthen its message to the public regarding Lyme Disease prevention. Partnering with the Division of Environmental Health PH Pest Management Section CDPH is committed to educating the public on avoiding tick bites and recognizing the early manifestations of Lyme Disease when the infection is easily treated and cured.