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Sussex County Health Division to Collaborate with State DOH and CDC on Powassan Virus

(Newton, NJ) The Sussex County Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Health was recently contacted by the New Jersey Department of Health (DOH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to participate in a survey on the Powassan virus. This year, Sussex County has had four cases of Powassan virus disease which is a rare illness spread by the bite of an infected tick. Many people infected with Powassan virus will not have any symptoms or will only have mild symptoms that they may not remember. Some people with Powassan virus infection get a fever, headache, and nausea. In others, Powassan virus infections may cause more severe neurologic disease with symptoms including confusion, loss of coordination, and seizures.

The recent cases of Powassan virus in Sussex County offer a unique opportunity to better understand the risk of infection in this area and to describe risk factors that might increase the chances of becoming ill. Information gained through this survey will result in improved educational messaging and materials. This will serve to increase clinician and public awareness of Powassan virus and may result in improved patient diagnosis.

The survey will take place during October 2019 and will be limited to 300 randomly selected households in Frankford and Hampton Townships. County Health, State and CDC staff will administer

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questionnaires to eligible participants on health and recreational activities, while trained medical staff will collect a small blood sample to test for Powassan virus antibodies. The random households will be contacted by a letter mailed from the Sussex County Division of Health during the first week of October.

Protect Yourself from Tick-Borne Illnesses

As with other tick-borne illnesses, there is no vaccine for the Powassan virus. Thus, the Health Division strongly urges residents to take preventative measures for themselves and loved ones against ticks. These preventative measures are encouraged for all Sussex County residents, and especially for those partaking in activities in densely wooded areas in which the risk for tick exposure may be high, such as hiking, camping, fishing, and hunting.

Preventative measures include: https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/avoid/on_people.html

- Know where ticks are - ticks live in or near wooded or grassy areas
- Always walk in the center of trails to avoid contact with ticks
- Keep your yard clean - mow lawns, clear brush and remove leaf litter
- Use EPA-registered repellent with DEET on skin and permethrin on clothing and boots
- Cover up - wear long sleeves and pants tucked into socks
- Inspect - check your body for ticks
- Shower after spending time outdoors to help find and wash off unattached ticks

An infected tick must be attached to an individual before it can transmit the virus. A tick found crawling on a person that has not attached, has not had the time to cause infection.

For more information, please visit the New Jersey Department of Health at <https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/powassan.shtml> and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/powassan/>.

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