

Tick infections soar on LI

Lyme disease seen mostly in boys, says Stony Brook panel

BY DELTHIA RICKS
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Tick-borne infections have reached epidemic proportions on Long Island, where children are disproportionately affected by Lyme disease and other infections transmitted by the eight-legged creatures, a panel of top scientists said Thursday.

"Lyme disease is mostly a disease of children and curiously mostly a disease of boys," Jorge Benach said at Thursday's symposium at Stony Brook University School of Medicine. Benach, who discovered the bacterium that causes Lyme disease, is a molecular geneticist at Stony Brook University School of Medicine.

His observation that Lyme disease is mostly an infection



Dr. Samuel Stanley

of children was corroborated by Dr. Christy Beneri, a pediatrician at Stony Brook Children's Hospital. She said her institution encountered a wide range of tick-borne illnesses annually and that boys tended to outnumber girls in the number of infections. The most likely reason for the disparity, Beneri said, is the tendency among boys to play outdoors in wooded areas where ticks thrive.

In the extensive pediatric research Beneri presented at the symposium was evidence of some children developing Bell's palsy, a temporary facial paralysis that occurs when the Lyme bacterium affects a cranial nerve. The paralysis resolves with antibiotic treatment, Beneri said.

Beyond the Lyme bacterium, ticks on Long Island have been found to harbor babesia and anaplasma.

Babesia are protozoa, or parasitic, infectious agents that home in on red blood cells, similar to the way a malaria parasite invades the same cells.

Anaplasmosis is an infection caused by the bacterium *Anaplasma phagocytophilum*. It can trigger aches, fever, chills and confusion.

Beneri and Benach were among five leading Stony Brook experts, including university president Dr. Samuel Stanley, who addressed what they described as a mounting epidemic of infections caused by

the ever-expanding range of ticks. Stanley, who was the first speaker, is a specialist in infectious diseases.

"New York bears a disproportionate impact from tick-borne diseases," Stanley said. "This is a regional and state problem."

New York has the highest number of confirmed Lyme disease cases nationwide, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has cataloged more than 95,000 Lyme infections in the state since 1986. Suffolk County has long been ground zero for the ailment on Long Island, studies consistently have shown.

"Cases in Suffolk County hover between 500 and 700 and this is just for the reported cases," Benach said, noting that Suffolk has among the highest rates of many tick-transmitted infections because of the dense infiltration of the insects in county.

Typical Lyme symptoms include fever, headache, fatigue, and a characteristic skin rash

called erythema migrans, said Dr. Luis Marcos, a specialist in internal medicine and infectious diseases.

Marcos presented data showing the wide range of illnesses caused by ticks throughout the region, including *Borrelia miyamotoi*, a corkscrew-shaped bacterium identified in recent years as the cause of a relapsing fever.

Dr. Eric Spitzer, a pathologist, discussed the many laboratory tests that Stony Brook used to arrive at a diagnosis of a tick-transmitted illness. He said that for years, doctors nationwide sent specimens to the university for analysis because of its well-known precision. Testing of those specimens earned the university \$32 million over a 20-year period, he said.

Panelists identified the most prevalent ticks on Long Island as the American dog tick; the invasive lone star tick, which migrated from Southern states; and the blacklegged tick, known as deer tick.

Gov to insurers: Urge commercial-GPS use

BY YANCEY ROY
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ALBANY — After a bus crashed into an overpass on the Southern State Parkway on Sunday night, the Cuomo administration is trying to get insurers involved in efforts to keep truck drivers and bus operators off restricted highways.

The administration sent a letter Thursday to insurers, urging them to encourage commercial drivers to use global positioning systems that give warnings about restricted highways, low bridges and alternate routes.

The letter was spurred by a State Police investigation that showed the driver of a coach bus full of students struck the parkway overpass after using a "non-commercial vehicle" GPS, meant for passenger cars, that routed him onto the Southern State. The bus smashed into a low bridge at Eagle Avenue in Lakeview, shearing off the vehicle's roof.

Two 17-year-olds suffered serious injuries, five passengers had moderate injuries and three dozen others suffered minor injuries.



The top of a coach bus full of students was sheared off Sunday night when it hit an overpass on the Southern State Parkway in Lakeview.

"The recent bridge strike on the Southern State Parkway was serious, avoidable and should be a wake-up for businesses that use buses, tractor trailers and similar vehicles," Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said in a statement.

In the letter, the Department of Financial Services told insurance companies they

have the "opportunity to be at the forefront in protecting all New Yorkers from avoidable tragedies like the one we have just experienced."

Scott Fischer, deputy superintendent for insurance, wrote that "insurers should assist and encourage policyholders to use only commercial GPS if

a GPS is in use at all."

Notably, the Cuomo administration stopped short of trying to mandate the use of commercial GPS.

In 2009, then-Gov. David A. Paterson proposed legislation that would have required just that. The measure failed because it raised legal issues

about restricting interstate commerce and trying to force out-of-state drivers to use the devices, according to the Trucking Association of New York.

The Professional Insurance Agents of New York, a lobby group, has no position on the GPS issue, spokeswoman Jane Czupryna said.