

For Immediate Release
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2006 tick season in Rhode Island was second highest on record
*URI researcher says 68 percent of Rhode Islanders
at risk of encountering deer ticks near home*

KINGSTON, R.I. – Deer tick abundance in Rhode Island for spring and summer 2006 increased by 7.1 percent over 2005, making it the second highest year on record for ticks in the state, according to a University of Rhode Island entomologist. Only in 2002 was there a higher abundance of these ticks in Rhode Island.

The ticks transmit Lyme disease, babesiosis and anaplasmosis.

“The reason for the high numbers this year probably can be attributed primarily to the fact that Rhode Island experienced the wettest May, June and July since 1982, and we know that tick numbers are tied closely to moisture levels during those months,” said Professor Thomas Mather, director of the URI Center for Vector-Borne Disease.

The URI researcher also noted that the number of babesiosis cases in Rhode Island increased significantly in 2006, and while all Lyme disease cases aren’t tracked in the state, Mather suspects that incidence of that disease increased as well.

Based on the results of this year’s tick survey, Mather said that 68 percent of Rhode Island residents are now at risk for encountering a deer tick close to home, up from about 26 percent in 1993 when tick surveillance in the state began.

During the annual statewide tick survey, the researchers found deer ticks – also known as black-legged ticks – at all of the 61 sites sampled. When the survey was first conducted, ticks were found at just 60 percent of the sites.

“Our research has found that more than 717,000 Rhode Islanders are now at risk for encountering a deer tick where they live,” said Mather, whose tick surveillance program has resulted in the world’s most comprehensive database on the changes in the distribution and abundance of deer ticks. “Twenty years ago, the state’s residents were largely free from this risk, unless they traveled to Prudence Island or Block Island.”

To combat the increasing health threat posed by deer ticks in the state, Mather and

his research team are launching a new initiative to “drive tick-borne disease out of Rhode Island”. The goal of the new program is to prevent disease from happening. “Technology development, public health outreach, and public participation are going to be the key drivers in making Rhode Island one of the safest northeastern states when it comes to tick-transmitted disease,” states Mather. “Now with so many people facing this risk,” he adds, “it definitely is the right time to take aggressive action.”

Mather and his team launched the nation’s first tick bite prevention website – www.tickencounter.org -- in June to provide site users with detailed information about tick biology, strategies for controlling ticks, health tips, and other information useful to anyone going outside in areas where ticks are abundant.

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