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Kane County Health Department Responds to Tickborne Heartland Virus Warning by Making “Tick Kits” Available to the Public

Last week, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) issued a warning that ticks carrying the Heartland virus had been reported in Kankakee County, Illinois. In an effort to educate and protect residents from tick bites, the Kane County Health Department has a limited number of “Tick Kits” available for Kane County residents. These kits, packaged in a handy pocket-sized carrying case, contain a Tick ID Card, a First Aid Quick Facts Guide, antibacterial hand wipes, first aid and burn cream, a wipe to treat skin after the insect bite and a pair of plastic tweezers for removing the tick.

The kits are available upon request at the Kane County Health Department offices, 1240 N. Highland Ave. in Aurora, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. until supplies are gone. Please bring proof of address to obtain your kit.

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.

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Kane County Health Department Responds to Tickborne Heartland Virus Warning by Making “Tick Kits” Available to the Public – page 2

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

For more information on how to protect yourself from ticks, visit the Kane County Health Department website at <http://kanehealth.com/Pages/Ticks.aspx>.

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