FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Debra Quackenbush
815-334-4456; cell 815-236-3238

Protect yourself from ticks, Lyme disease

Woodstock III. – McHenry County Department of Health (MCDH) is reminding residents to take precautions against tick bites to prevent contracting the diseases they carry, in particular Lyme disease. Ticks live in and near wooded areas, tall grass and brush and are typically active April through November. Although the American Dog Tick and the Lone Star Tick can spread disease, the Black-legged or Deer Tick is the most common disease carrier in Illinois and surrounding states and is largely responsible for the spread of Lyme disease.

In 2014, 33 cases of Lyme disease were reported in McHenry County as well as three other tick-borne illnesses (Babesiosis, Ehrlichiosis, and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever). This is a slight drop from the 37 cases reported in 2013.

Lyme disease typically occurs 3 to 30 days after exposure to an infected tick. Symptoms vary greatly from person to person and may include fatigue, chills and fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, swollen lymph nodes and skin rash (often with a “bull’s eye” appearance). In most cases, the tick must be attached for 36-48 hours or more before the Lyme disease bacterium can be transmitted so it’s important to check yourself after being outside. Many cases of Lyme disease can be treated successfully with a few weeks of antibiotics. If you experience these symptoms, and have had possible exposure to ticks, contact your physician for reporting to MCDH. If physicians have questions regarding testing, please call MCDH’s Communicable Disease program.

The best way to protect against tick-borne illness includes –

- Educate yourself, family about tick identification, removal and symptom awareness.
- Walk in the center of trails. Avoid wooded, bushy areas with high grass and leaf litter (including vacant lots in residential areas).
- Wear light-colored clothing to make ticks easier to find. Tuck long pants into socks and boots.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET (20% or more) to exposed skin. Follow label instructions.
- Conduct full-body tick checks on family members (including underarms, in/around ears, inside belly button, behind knees, between legs, around waists, and especially in the hair). Also check any gear taken on outings.
• Tick bites on dogs may be hard to detect. Keep pets out of tick habitats like tall grass/brush. Always examine pets before bringing them inside. Ask your vet to recommend an over-the-counter tick repellent.
• The CDC recommends bathing or showering as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within two hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks.

Staff in the Division of Environmental Health can assist residents with the identification of ticks. Additional information on identification and testing of ticks is available on the MCDH webpage www.mcdh.info, select Environmental Health, Nuisance, and follow the link to ticks and Lyme disease.

For more information on Lyme disease, contact MCDH's Communicable Disease Program 815-334-4500, visit www.mcdh.info, select Environmental Health, link to Nuisance, or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/.