

Experts issue tick warning for summer

- *Plan ahead for outdoor adventures and overseas travel*
- *See a doctor if worried about symptoms*

Sydney Australia – Thursday 1st December 2016: Experts are warning Australians about the reality of tick-borne illnesses in summer as people head outdoors to enjoy the warmer months. People planning overseas travel are also encouraged to be cautious during hikes and other outdoor activities.

Director of the Karl McManus Foundation and infectious disease researcher Dr Mualla McManus says that confusion and mixed messages around tick-borne diseases can distract people from being vigilant on the issue.

“The recent Federal Senate enquiry highlighted a range of competing views on the definitions of tick-borne diseases. However the reality is that tick-borne diseases exist in Australia and ticks are more prevalent in the warmer spring and summer months,” said Dr McManus.

Tick borne disease left untreated can lead to chronic and debilitating illness and cause issues with mobility, eyesight, cognitive impairment and overall wellbeing.

According to Dr McManus, the most important thing is for people to go immediately to see a doctor if they have symptoms they think might be caused by a tick bite. Symptoms can include flu-like symptoms tiredness, muscle aches and pains, stiff neck, cognitive impairment and sensitivity to light.

In regard to prevention, Dr McManus says vigilance and visiting your doctor is the key to staying fit and healthy this summer season.

“There is ongoing debate and research among scientists, policy makers and healthcare professionals to determine exactly what tick-borne pathogens we have here in Australia. We are urging people to put that to the side. The best thing you can do is stay watchful and take some simple precautions to avoid being bitten. If you are bitten, stay alert to any indications of illness.”

“Many people don’t connect the symptoms they are experiencing with being bitten by a tick. Because of this it may not be raised when they visit the doctor, which can lead to a misdiagnosis. So, it’s important to raise tick bite experiences with your doctor even if some time has passed,” said Dr McManus.

Long grasses and bushland provide ideal environments for ticks, and if you live close to these areas, it is not uncommon to have paralysis ticks in your garden¹. Paralysis ticks have a distinct seasonality – reaching full maturity during the warmer spring and early summer months¹. Ticks are most active during periods of high humidity, especially after rain. Related insects such as biting midges breed in wet soils and sandy beach areas².

Top tips for staying protected from ticks this summer:

1. Wear light coloured clothing when outdoors so you can see small ticks
 2. Check your body, children and pets thoroughly when you return from outdoor activity – this includes behind the ears, in the hair and back of the head
 3. Once home, place your clothing in the dryer on high heat for 30 minutes to kill any ticks
 4. Cut grass and trim shrubs and small trees around your home regularly
 5. Grow insect repelling plants in your garden such as chrysanthemums, citronella, lavender or garlic
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People can visit www.kmf.org.au to complete a survey on their symptoms to take to their doctor and find advice on how to safely remove a tick.

The Karl McManus Foundation is currently calling for people who have been bitten by a tick and who have not travelled outside Australia to donate blood as part of an ongoing research project into tick-borne disease. For more detail please contact info@kmf.org.au.

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For more information, interviews or for media enquiries contact:

Ishtar Schneider

Palin Communications

0422 944 023 / 02 9412 2255

ishtar@palin.com.au

Maya Ivanovic

Palin Communications

0403 354 305 / 02 9412 2255

maya@palin.com.au

References:

1. Australian Department of Health: Tick bite prevention. Accessed 23 November 2016. <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-tick-bite-prevention.htm>
2. Byron Shire Council. Accessed 23 November 2016. <http://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/protect-yourself-from-biting-midges-sand-flies>

About the Karl McManus Foundation:

The Karl McManus Foundation is a leading Australian charity and organisation dedicated to education and evidence-based research for Australian tick-borne diseases. The organisation acts as an advocate for improved testing, treatment and education of tick-borne diseases in Australia.

The Karl McManus Foundation relies upon fundraising and generous donations from the public to support its research programs and education activities.

For more information visit: www.kmf.org.au