

Tick-borne encephalitis virus detected in ticks in the UK for the first time

October 29 2019



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Tick-borne encephalitis virus (TBEV) has been detected for the first time in ticks in the UK. The findings are part of ongoing research by Public Health England (PHE) and the Emerging and Zoonotic Infections

National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Protection Research Unit at the University of Liverpool.

Tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) is an infection spread by tick bites and is endemic in mainland Europe and Scandinavia, as well as Asia. Most people who catch TBE will not have any symptoms; though it can cause flu-like symptoms and in a small number of cases can progress to more serious disease involving the central nervous system.

The virus has been detected in a small number of ticks in Thetford Forest and an area on the border between Hampshire and Dorset. Further work is under way to identify the distribution of TBEV infected tick populations.

Earlier this year a European visitor became ill after being bitten by a tick in the New Forest area. This is considered to be a highly probable case of tick-borne encephalitis (TBE). The patient, who was reported to PHE through the European Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), has since made a full recovery.

To date, no other cases of TBE considered likely to have been acquired in the UK have been identified. The risk from TBEV is currently assessed as very low for the general population.

Dr. Nick Phin, Deputy Director, National Infections Service, Public Health England, said: "Tick-borne encephalitis virus, which is endemic in many European countries, has been found for the first time in a very small number of ticks in two locations in England. These are early research findings and indicate the need for further work, however, the risk to the [general public](#) is currently assessed to be very low.

Professor Matthew Baylis, who co-supervised the research at the University's Institute of Infection and Global Health, said: "The

discovery of a new tick-borne virus in the United Kingdom is important, as it reinforces the message that the public need to be 'tick-aware' when walking in the countryside where they may be exposed to tick bites. The public should take basic protective measures, such as using repellents, keeping to paths, wearing light-coloured clothing, tucking trousers into socks and checking regularly for ticks."

Lyme disease remains the most common tick-borne [infection](#) in the UK, and the risk of acquiring Lyme substantially outweighs that of acquiring TBEV.

Ticks are found throughout the year but are most active between spring and autumn.

Contact your GP or dial 111 if you begin to feel unwell with flu-like symptoms following a tick bite.

Provided by University of Liverpool

Citation: Tick-borne encephalitis virus detected in ticks in the UK for the first time (2019, October 29) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-10-tick-borne-encephalitis-virus-uk.html>

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