



# News Release

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## **DPH ANNOUNCES FIRST CASES OF POWASSAN VIRUS INFECTION THIS YEAR** *Residents Are Advised To Protect Themselves And Their Children From Tick Bites*

HARTFORD, Conn.-- The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) today announced that two Connecticut residents have tested positive for Powassan virus (POWV) infection. These are the first cases of POWV associated illness identified in Connecticut in 2021. During 2016 to 2020, 10 cases of POWV associated illness were reported in Connecticut, including 2 in 2020. Two of the infections were fatal.

The patients, who are between 50-79 years of age, became ill during the third week of April. Laboratory tests performed at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Laboratory in Ft. Collins, Colorado confirmed the presence of antibodies to POWV. Both patients were hospitalized with central nervous system disease and have been discharged and are recovering. The patients reside in Fairfield and New Haven Counties.

"The identification of two Connecticut residents with Powassan virus associated illness emphasizes the need to take actions to prevent tick bites while ticks are most active, from now through the late fall." said DPH Acting Commissioner Deidra S. Gifford, MD, MPH. "Using insect repellent, avoiding areas where ticks are likely, and checking carefully for ticks after being outside can reduce the chance of you or your children being infected with this virus."

Powassan virus is spread to people through the bite of an infected tick black-legged, or 'deer' tick. It takes 1 week to 1 month after the bite of an infected tick to develop symptoms of POWV disease, and the virus can be transmitted in as little as 15 minutes after the tick first attaches. Powassan virus associated illness have been reported from early spring until late fall.

While most people infected with POWV likely experience no symptoms or a mild flu-like illness, some people will develop severe illness affecting the central nervous system. About 1 out of 10 cases of severe illness are fatal and approximately half of survivors experience long term health problems. Severe cases may begin with fever, vomiting, headache, or weakness and rapidly progress to confusion, loss of coordination, difficulty speaking, or seizures. There is not a vaccine or a specific treatment for POWV associated illness. Severe illnesses are treated by supportive therapy which may include hospitalization, respiratory support, IV fluids, and prevention of other infections.

(more)

### **Tips for preventing tick bites**

- Avoid areas where ticks are likely to be, such as in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas. Ticks are active from spring to fall and may also be active on warmer days during winter.
- Consider the use of CDC-recommended mosquito repellents, containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, IR3535, or 2-undecanone, and apply according to directions, when outdoors.
- Check yourself and your children for ticks immediately after coming indoors. Showering within 2 hours of coming indoors may be effective in reducing the risk of tick-borne disease.
- Examine clothing, gear, and pets carefully after coming indoors. Tumble dry clothing for 10 minutes to kill ticks that were carried inside.
- Talk to your veterinarian about the best tick prevention products for your dog.
- Consider treating items such as boots, clothing, and hiking or camping gear with products containing 0.5% permethrin.

For information on Powassan virus and how to prevent tick bites, visit

<https://www.cdc.gov/powassan/index.html>