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Tick-borne illnesses soar in TN

Her parents never saw a tick or any indication of a bite, but 7-year-old Kaitlyn Stetzer spent almost a week in the hospital with what doctors believe is Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

She came home from the hospital Saturday.

"Thanks so much for all the prayers — please keep praying for Kaitlyn," her father, the Rev. Ed Stetzer, wrote on his blog.

The Hendersonville girl is among several Middle Tennessee residents who have gotten sick with the fever — a tick-borne illness that is more widespread this spring. As of mid-May, 74 confirmed cases have occurred statewide — a threefold increase from the same period a year ago. Six of those cases are in Davidson County, and 15 are in the counties surrounding Nashville. The Tennessee Department of Health is urging people to take precautions against exposure and to recognize signs of the illness.

"Rocky Mountain spotted fever is a very serious illness," said Dr. John Dunn, deputy state epidemiologist. "It can be a fatal illness, but when recognized early, the treatment is highly effective."

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is the most common tick-borne illness in Tennessee, but there are others. A mild winter followed by early spring means insects that carry all types of diseases will be worse this year, said Frank Hale, professor of entomology with the University of Tennessee Extension. West Nile virus has already been found in mosquitoes in North Nashville — the earliest positive detection the Metro Public Health Department has ever reported.

Kaitlyn's recovery from Rocky Mountain spotted fever has been slow because she did not start taking doxycycline, the recommended medication, sooner, her father said. The classic symptoms of the d isease — a high fever, joint pain and a rash — came later in the course of her illness. Doctors began administering the medicine before a firm diagnosis.

"If you wait for the actual confirmation, it could come when it's too late," Stetzer said.

Kaitlyn's fever peaked at just under 104 degrees on Wednesday at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. That day,

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Stetzer and elders from Grace Church, where he is the pastor, anointed the girl with oil and prayed for her healing. Stetzer also serves as vice president of research and ministry development for LifeWay Christian Resources.

"She kept going down every day," he said. "From Sunday, every day was progressively worse. On Wednesday, we despaired of Thursday because we just didn't know how much more down it could go."

By Friday, the family could tell she was finally getting better. That morning, Stetzer fed French toast to Kaitlyn, who was no longer having to receive intravenous fluids.

"Everyone has heard of Rocky Mountain spotted fever, but I had no idea how serious this was," he said. "You are having conversations about mortality rates and everything else. We've been pretty worn out, but right now we're just relieved."

Dunn said it is not unusual for one or two deaths from a tick-borne illness to occur in Tennessee during the spring to autumn period, but he is not aware of any this season. Although a tick bite by itself is not a reason to seek antibiotics, he said, anyone who gets a fever after a bite should seek treatment from a medical provider.

Preventive measures

Children who have been outdoors should be checked carefully for ticks, but sometimes the pests end up inside. Often, t hey come in on a pet, even if the pet has been treated for ticks and fleas, Hale said.

Keeping the grass mowed is one of the ways to keep ticks and other pests out of your home.

"It lowers the moisture in the grass," Hale said. "That allows sunlight to penetrate and it causes these ticks to dry out. Usually to get moisture, a tick has to go down to the ground and kind of reabsorb some moisture. When it gets enough moisture, it goes back up on the high grass, where it waits for a host to come by."

Spraying with an insect repellent containing DEET will help ward off ticks. The best option for people who don't want to use the repellent is to wear long, light-colored pants and to tuck the legs into their socks. Ticks are easier to spot on the light-colored clothing.

Anyone who is reluctant to use DEET on children because of concerns about chemical exposure can use it without making skin contact, Hale said. Recently, he sprayed his shoes, socks and pants when he went into the forest.

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"I forgot to give a co-worker the spray," Hale said. "He didn't do it and found like five ticks on him. I did not have any. It works."

Dunn also recommended the use of DEET-containing repellents. A stronger repellent is permethrin, which can be sprayed on clothing.

"Typically, we recommend using a DEET-containing product," Dunn said. "There are a variety of those on the marketplace. There are some specific recommendations about permethrins and some permethrin-impregnated clothing. Those require following directions, but they can be used both for adults' and children's clothing. For any of those repellents, it is important to look at the label. There are different formulations, different strengths, and people need to be aware of that."

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Kaitlyn Stetzer

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Diamond Pet Foods issues another dog food recall

META, MO. — Missouri-based Diamond Pet Foods is voluntarily recalling another type of dog food because of potential exposure to salmonella.

The recall announced Friday applies to samples, 6-pound bags and 18-pound bags of Diamond Naturals Small Breed Adult Dog Lamb & Rice Formula dry dog food manufactured on Aug. 26, 2011.

The company says it has received no reports of illnesses among dogs who consumed the food or people who handled it.

The product was distributed in Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin.

Diamond Pet Foods' voluntary recalls earlier this spring included batches of Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul Adult Light Formula and Diamond Naturals Lamb Meal & Rice.

The latest recall covers the following production codes and best-before dates:

- DSL0801, 26-Aug-2012
- DSL0801, 27-Sept-2012
- DSL0801, 18-Oct-2012
- DSL0801 (samples)

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