

Mt. Equinox, VT – Gear Up For Lyme Bike Climb

Remarks of Pat Smith, President, Lyme Disease Association, Gear Up for Lyme (VT) 2013

Welcome and thanks to all of you who participated, organized or supported the bikers in this race today and the past 9 years. Since the first race in 2004, the Manchester Rotary has raised a total of more than \$66,000 for the LDA for its Lyme disease programs. Those monies have been used for research efforts at the Columbia Lyme Disease Research Center in NY, a center endowed by the LDA and its CT affiliate, LRA, and LDA/Rotary monies have also been used to support research right here in VT at Lyndon State College. That research was published earlier this year in the Journal Northeastern Naturalist. Dr. Alan Geise & others found that *B. burgdorferi*, the bacteria that causes Lyme, in 8.9% of adult black-legged ticks they collected along the CT River in VT.

So it's no surprise then that in 2011, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, CDC, 623 cases of Lyme were reported in VT, which ranked 13th in case numbers nationwide. Since cases are under reported by ten, 6,230 cases probably occurred in VT in 2011 alone. The US had 33,097 reported cases, or 330,970 actual cases that same year. Astoundingly, in 2011, VT ranked number two in incidence of Lyme disease in the US with, 76 cases/100,000 of population.

Thanks to advocates within Vermont, legislators here have begun to address the issue. H-123, "An Act Relating to Lyme Disease and Other Tick-Borne Illnesses," was introduced in Jan. 2013 into the VT House and referred to the Committee on Health Care. It permits doctors to prescribe long-term antibiotics for Lyme disease and it also requires insurers to cover such treatment. In February 2013, S-0112, a bill similar to the House bill, was introduced in the VT Senate, and it

remains in the Health and Welfare Committee. No action has been taken to date on either bill.

Cases elsewhere in the Northeast are rising. This year, the state of Maine, which ranked 11th in 2011, passed a bill addressing Lyme disease which states that doctors must provide a copy of the Lyme test results to patients, and that Lyme disease may be difficult to diagnose and treat; and some patients do not respond to usual antibiotic treatment, and doctors do treat longer term and it is sometimes helpful, but there can be problems with long term treatment. A negative test does not rule out Lyme disease. Additionally, the bill also the state of Maine will post a number of sites for Lyme information including the Lyme Disease Association website.

Now it is known that bacteria similar to the Lyme bacteria called *Borrelia miyamotoi* are also being found in ticks in the US. This strain of the bacteria has produced disease in other countries and appears to be doing the same in the US. This bacteria just adds to the many other tick-borne organisms that people can now become infected with from a tick bite, producing diseases including: babesiosis, ehrlichiosis, anaplasmosis, bartonellosis, tularemia, RMSF, and STARI. The list is growing, and few research dollars are being given to halt the spread of these diseases, many of which are now worldwide, with Lyme itself found in 65 countries.

LDA continues its mission against these diseases. I just returned from a trip to Ft. Collins, CO, the home of the Vector-Borne Disease Division of the CDC, where we discussed the impact of Lyme on people nationwide and the need for more research. To date, LDA has awarded more than 94 research grants, and research funded by LDA has been acknowledged in 31 medical journals. It has provided more than 80 educational grants and helped more than 230 children without insurance to get diagnosed or begin treatment. The Manchester Rotary has become a partner in that effort by hosting this annual Gear Up Bike Climb, and donating a portion of the funds to LDA for its

mission. Everyone should be concerned about the spread of tick-borne diseases, and our children ages 5-14 remain at the highest risk for infection from the Lyme bacteria. Thanks again to the Rotary, the Holzmanns, and you for your generosity. Together, we can make a difference.