

# Gottheimer Announces Federal Action to Combat the Uptick in Ticks & Lyme Disease in NJ

*NJ has four times the national average of Lyme disease cases*

West Milford, NJ, June 10, 2021



*Above: Gottheimer in West Milford today.*

**WEST MILFORD, NJ** – Today, June 10, 2021, U.S. Congressman Josh Gottheimer (NJ-5), a member of the Congressional Lyme Disease Caucus, announced bipartisan federal action to help protect families from Lyme disease and to find new treatments for tick-borne illnesses. Gottheimer was joined by environmental and health experts to highlight how North Jersey families can protect themselves from ticks and Lyme disease as they enjoy outdoor activities this summer.

New Jersey had four times the national average of Lyme disease cases in 2020.

While Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics in many cases, it can also be difficult to diagnose due to its diverse manifestations and a lack of reliable testing options. Many of those infected do not realize their diagnosis until the symptoms have become severe. Current tests for Lyme disease often produce false negatives. There is currently no cure for Lyme disease.

**Today, Gottheimer announced that he is helping introduce and push for the following bipartisan bills:**

**The Children Inflicted by Lyme Disabilities Act** – a bipartisan bill to help ensure children who suffer from Lyme disease get the care and attention they need. The bill (H.R.3636) will amend the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act so that the phrase “child with a disability” includes a child who needs special education and related services due to a Lyme disease health impairment.

**Bipartisan legislation for competitions to find Lyme disease treatments** – This bipartisan bill (H.R. 3637) will authorize the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to launch prize competitions to drive innovation and accelerate the discovery of new methods to counter and treat Lyme disease.

**The Stamp Out Lyme Disease Act** – a bipartisan bill (H.R. 3491) to create a brand new postage stamp to supplement congressionally-appropriated research funding for Lyme and tick-borne disease treatments at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

“Lyme disease can be brutally debilitating, hard to detect and treat, and cause real long-term health issues. It’s a problem that we must try to solve,” **said Congressman Josh Gottheimer.** “The federal action I’m announcing today will boost investment for Lyme disease research, incentivize the development of new treatments, and amend federal law to accommodate the health impairments that can be caused by Lyme

disease in children, so they can receive the specialized education and care they need.”

“It is imperative that we get help for the thousands of sick Lyme patients – 29% are children. We need Congress to act quickly to not only provide money but to ensure the monies are actually being used to help Lyme and tick-borne disease patients by providing cutting edge diagnostics and treatment therapies for the 20+% who remain sick after a short course of antibiotics. I thank Congressman Gottheimer and the House Lyme Disease Caucus for their continued efforts in this area,” **said Pat Smith, the President of Lyme Disease Association Inc.**

“The pandemic has proven that people need access to the outdoors to be mentally and physically healthy. We must be vigilant and check for ticks, but we can’t let Lyme disease keep us locked indoors. This legislation gives me hope that we’ll find a cure and finally stamp out Lyme disease, once and for all,” **said Don Weise, of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference and the West Milford Environmental Commission.**

Gottheimer was joined at today’s announcement at the West Milford Wetlands Environmental Center by Passaic County Commissioner Terry Duffy, Lyme Disease Association President Pat Smith, President, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference Membership & Development Director and member of the West Milford Environmental Commission Don Weise, and local Lyme disease patients and advocates Doreen Edwards, Whitney Klein, and Gloria Kim.

*Watch the announcement here.*

*Below: Gottheimer meeting with local Lyme disease patients and advocates today.*



*Gottheimer's full remarks as prepared for delivery are below.*

There's been a lot of news of the 17-year cicadas emerging across the East Coast and Midwest. We've got them here in New Jersey, and NJ.com reported yesterday that the cicadas' invasion is at its peak. But, despite being incredibly loud and pervasive, these insects are pretty harmless. As we kick off the summer, the real, legitimate threat we have to face is ticks, and a disease they can spread: Lyme disease.

And as it's been reported, there's been a real uptick in ticks.

I'm here this morning to make sure that New Jersey families know how to watch out for ticks as they enjoy activities outdoors this summer, and to announce new federal legislation to help combat Lyme disease, which many ticks carry, and to support patients dealing with Lyme disease.

Lyme disease can be brutally debilitating, hard to detect and treat, and cause real long-term health issues. It's a problem that we must try to solve.

The federal action I'm announcing today will boost investment

for Lyme disease research, incentivize the development of new treatments, and amend federal law to accommodate the health impairments that can be caused by Lyme disease in children, so they can receive the specialized education and care they need.

Here's what we know about ticks this summer, here in North Jersey:

Annually, there are around 476,000 cases of Lyme disease reported across the United States.

Here in Jersey, and especially in more rural, beautifully-wooded communities like West Milford, Lyme disease is a major and growing threat. According to data from 2020, an average of 36 cases per 100,000 members of our population are diagnosed in New Jersey every single year – more than four times the national average. Yes, we are a center for Lyme disease!

That means we have to be on the lookout for the culprit this summer: ticks.

Lyme disease is spread through the bite of infected ticks, which can attach to any part of the human body.

High-brush or wooded areas tend to harbor ticks, so families enjoying parks here in North Jersey this summer need to be careful. By using repellents, wearing proper clothing, and consistently checking yourself and your pets for ticks, and for a red circle on your skin, even after a tick bites and falls off, the risk of Lyme disease can be reduced.

While Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics in many cases, it can also be difficult to diagnose because of its diverse manifestations and a lack of reliable testing options. Many of those infected do not realize their diagnosis until the symptoms have become severe. Even the tests we have for Lyme often produce false negatives several times before an accurate diagnosis. And, unfortunately, there is no cure right



now.

From the Tick-Borne Disease Working Group, created by Congress, we know that 10 to 20 percent of Lyme disease patients will suffer from persistent symptoms, which can be chronic and disabling. And we have families here in North Jersey who have seen the impacts of this disease firsthand.

Joining us today are several New Jersey patients and families, like Doreen, who spent years waiting for the correct diagnosis; Gloria, who had to search extensively to find a specialist to treat her son when he was diagnosed; and Whitney, who has seen an unprecedented spike in Lyme disease in her family and community. My own sister-in-law has struggled with Lyme disease for more than a decade; one of my wife's closest friends has faced debilitating years, too. It's a silent attacker – and it's time to fight back much more aggressively.

That's why, as a member of the Congressional Lyme Disease Caucus, I'm announcing my support for three key pieces of bipartisan legislation, so that we can better protect our families.

The bipartisan Children Inflicted by Lyme Disabilities Act will help ensure children who suffer from Lyme disease get the care and attention they need. That means – with this bill – for which I was one of the first sponsors with Republican Chris Smith, who represents south Jersey – if a child develops a mental disability or a health impairment because of their Lyme disease diagnosis, they can receive special education and services to help them learn and to manage the disease.

I'm also supporting bipartisan legislation to boost investment in preventing, diagnosing, and treating Lyme disease. Our bill, which I also helped introduce with Congressman Smith, who is an incredibly dedicated advocate in the fight against Lyme disease, will authorize the Department of Health and

Human Services to create prize competitions to drive innovation and accelerate the discovery of new methods to counter and treat Lyme disease. It's my hope that, with New Jersey's leadership and innovation in the medical, pharmaceutical, and life sciences industries, we can play a key role in developing these new treatments – and maybe even a cure.

And finally, I'm announcing support for another key bipartisan initiative to boost investment in R&D for Lyme disease treatment. The Stamp Out Lyme Disease Act will create a brand new postage stamp to supplement congressionally-appropriated research funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to research treatments for Lyme and tick-borne diseases.

That means, when you're out mailing a birthday card or sending a letter to your grandmother, you can help fund the research we need to finally find better treatments for this disease.

On these fronts, I'm proud to be working across the aisle. There is nothing partisan about a tick bite and Lyme disease.

This is not a left or right issue. This affects our families, and we need to do more.

It's my goal that families from across New Jersey and our entire region will come enjoy the outdoors here in the Garden State this summer – whether it's here at the West Milford Wetlands Environmental Center, at the beautiful Delaware Water Gap, or on New Jersey's 72 miles of the Appalachian Trail, which run right through this Congressional District. I want families to protect themselves from ticks and from the Lyme disease they may carry, all while enjoying the natural beauty we have to offer.

And I want our residents and families who've been affected by Lyme disease to know I stand with them – to push federal bipartisan action forward to boost investment in finding new treatments, and to make sure any child with any impairment or

disability from this disease can get the educational services and care they need.

To make progress on this, we must work together at every level – in Congress, and right here at home. Only then will we be able to overcome Lyme disease and its impacts.

I have every faith – by working together, like we're coming together today, here in the greatest country in the world– that our best days will always be ahead of us.

God bless you and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

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**[Click here for press release on Rep. Gottheimer's website](#)**

**[Click here for LDA article on the press conference](#)**