

Contact: Melissa Chefec, MCPR Public Relations, 203-968-6625

For Immediate Release

PROTECTING KIDS FROM LYME DISEASE
Lyme infections can be especially common—and dangerous—in children

Greenwich, CT, April 2010 – As summer approaches, most parents think about stocking up on sunscreen (and possibly Band-Aids) in anticipation of their kids' warm-weather adventures. But many forget the danger presented by tiny parasites, called *Ixodes scapularis* (also known as black-legged or deer ticks). These are the ticks that transmit Lyme disease, the most common tick-borne disease in the United States and one of the most potentially dangerous infections for kids.

Lyme disease poses the biggest threat in the spring and summer, says Diane Blanchard, co-president of Time for Lyme, Inc., a research, education and advocacy group based in CT. According to the latest government figures, there are roughly 29,000 confirmed Lyme disease cases in 2008 and experts agree that there are many, many more that go unreported (or undiagnosed). In fact, some estimate that there are ten times as many cases of Lyme each year. And although Lyme can strike people of any age and either gender, one of the most susceptible groups is children aged 5 to 9.

Spring and summer are the peak times for Lyme infection because many ticks are in the nymphal stage (they have a two-year life cycle), meaning they're very small, about the size of a poppy seed, says Dr. Harriet Kotsoris, medical advisor to Time for Lyme. "These things are tiny, and most kids would never notice them," says Dr. Kotsoris. At the same time, kids are spending more time outside, in areas where ticks also frequent.

As in adults, Lyme disease can be devastating in children. Most people with Lyme disease experience a rash, headaches, fatigue and flu-like symptoms, but if left untreated, the disease can also involve learning and behavioral problems, depression, nerve damage, memory loss and other cognitive, psychiatric and neurological complications. Children with serious Lyme infections have developed symptoms very similar to those of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and other neuropsychological disorders.

Unfortunately, many parents don't know much about Lyme disease — or how to prevent it.

Here are four things to teach your children about avoiding Lyme:

1. **Stay out of the bushes.** Ticks typically hide in dark, moist areas, such as tall grass and shrubs, so kids should hike and play in clear areas. Be sure to keep swing sets and other toys away from long grassy or wooded areas, as well.
2. **Wear the right clothes (and repellent).** Kids should wear closed-toe shoes (not sandals), socks, long pants and long-sleeved shirts in light colors (it's tougher to spot ticks on dark fabrics). Parents should consider using an approved insect repellent made with the chemical DEET. They are encouraged to ask their physicians advice on the appropriate amount of DEET for their family. Some repellents that contain the insecticide Permethrin are only safe for use on clothes, not skin.
3. **Do regular Tick Tests.** Teach your child to check his skin and hair for ticks every time he comes inside after playing in a tick-friendly area. He should pay special attention to underarms, the backs of his knees, waist, groin and hairline. When you think of Lyme, remember that timing is everything: Unlike mosquitoes or other biting insects, a tick must grab hold and burrow its mouth parts into the skin before it can begin feeding, a process that usually takes between 10 and 30 minutes. During this process the tick anesthetizes the area of the bite so the host or child or victim does not feel it. The chances of contracting

Lyme disease from an infected tick increases with the length of time it's attached. Thus, being vigilant with inspections means your child is much less likely to have a tick bite. And if that tick is infected, the bite is much less likely to cause problems if it's discovered quickly.

4. **Remove it right.** If your child finds a tick, she should tell you right away (you can teach an older child how to remove it herself). Remove the tick by grasping its head with fine-tipped tweezers as close to the point of contact or as close to the skin as possible and pulling gently, straight away from the body (don't twist). It is critical to note that improper removal can lead to disease.

About Time for Lyme

Time for Lyme is an organization dedicated to eliminating the devastating effects of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illness. Its mission is to prevent the spread of disease, develop definitive diagnostic tools and effective treatments, and to ultimately find a cure for tick-borne illness by supporting research, education, and the acquisition and dissemination of information. In addition, TFL continues to act as an advocate for Lyme disease sufferers and their families through support of legislative reform on the federal, state and local levels. www.timeforlyme.org.

Time for Lyme will present an educational forum titled, "Lyme Disease: Your Body, Your Brain..." on Thursday, April 22nd 7:00- 9:00 PM at the Central Middle School, 9 Indian Rock Lane, Greenwich, CT 06830. The forum is presented in cooperation with The Greenwich Department of Health, and Families for Greenwich Hospital and is open to the public at no cost. No reservations are required.