Ticks Fatality File

NJ man dies with rare scary tick disease; another seriously ill

NEWTON — The potentially deadly Powassan tick-borne virus has been confirmed in two Sussex County residents, one of whom died last month, state health officials confirmed Saturday.

The Powassan virus is spread by the deer tick. The illness is rarer than Lyme disease, which is also spread by the tick, but 10% of people who contract the illness die from it.

A Department of Health official on Saturday said that the department had not determined the cause of death for the patient who died last month but said that lab results this week confirmed that he had the virus.

A second victim continues to recover at home.

Symptoms of the virus include brain swelling, meningitis, fever, headache, vomiting, weakness, confusion, loss of coordination, trouble speaking and memory loss. Symptoms can appear a week to a month after a tick bite, although some people show no symptoms and do not require treatment.

There is no vaccine or cure for the disease. Treatment includes hospitalization, support for breathing and intravenous fluids.

Prevention involves the same precautions that should be taken to avoid Lyme disease: avoid wooded areas with tall grasses, use insect repellent while outdoors, and check for ticks after being outdoors.