

Lyme disease

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before it finally shows up."

Kim thinks that she may have been exposed while visiting her family in western Philadelphia, where the disease is more prevalent than in the Back Mountain.

Her battle with Lyme disease began in June, 1990, three weeks before her daughter was born. At first her doctor thought that the symptoms were related to her pregnancy or to stress.

But when the lightheadedness, fatigue and bright spots in front of her eyes didn't go away, the seemingly endless rounds of tests began.

"I underwent every test imaginable: blood work, MRI's, everything. Two doctors said that I didn't have the necessary symptoms for Lyme disease," she said. Although Kim was diagnosed with Lyme disease a year later by a doctor from the University of Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia, she didn't find a doctor who treated it to her satisfaction until August, 1992, when she was referred to an internist in New Jersey. Half of his patients have Lyme disease.

The two tests which diagnosed Kim's Lyme disease, a Lyme disease titer and the Western blot, test the immune system's reaction to the corkscrew-shaped spirochete bacteria which causes it, according to Dr. Richard Tilton of North American Laboratory Groups in Connecticut.

One of the problems in diagnosing Lyme disease is that it mimics other ailments: chronic fatigue syndrome, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, acute meningitis, Alzheimer's, Bell's palsy (paralysis of the muscles in the face) and several different diseases of the heart or central nervous system, Dr. Tilton said.

Vision problems, recurring conjunctivitis, weight gain (30-40 lbs.), metabolic problems, hormonal problems and skin rashes which don't resemble the "bull's-eye" rash can also sometimes be linked to Lyme disease, according to a pamphlet published by Infuserve America in Connecticut.

"You start to think that you're crazy, that it's all in your head," Kim said. "I don't think that some doctors take this seriously. They

shouldn't just write it off."

She currently knows four other people who have been diagnosed with Lyme disease and believes that there are many people who have it but don't know it because their symptoms have been incorrectly diagnosed.

Some of the tests can give false readings, either false negatives or false positives.

"Many of the Lyme disease test kits currently on the market aren't too reliable because the disease is very complex and affects many of the body's systems. Lyme disease doesn't lend itself to simple testing solutions," Dr. Tilton said.

Early detection and treatment are important because Lyme disease can cause permanent damage, according to Dr. Bernie Healey of the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

Treatment consists of oral and intravenous antibiotics.

Kim has been treated with several types of antibiotics, for which she had to have a semi-permanent intravenous line inserted in her arm, the first time for two weeks, then later for six weeks.

Now she takes oral antibiotics and vitamins and other supplements to boost her immune system and counteract the medications' long-term effects.

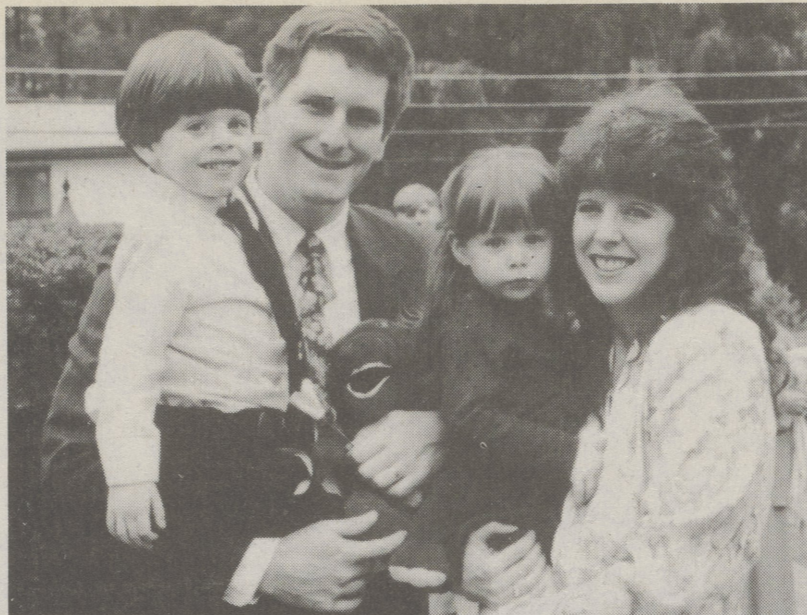
Every month her doctor orders blood work to see that all of Kim's body's systems and organs are working properly.

She must also be sure to eat properly and get enough rest to avoid flareups of the disease, which she says isn't as bad as it once was.

"I'm 29 years old and want to live as normal a life as possible," Kim said. "I'm too young for this to stop me. It already took a whole year from me - I'm determined not to let that happen again."

She credits her faith as a born-again Christian as her source of strength. "What I held on to the most was Romans 8:28," she said.

"If this is the Lord's purpose for me having Lyme disease, so that I can make others aware of it and help them get proper testing and diagnosis, then it's kind of worth it."



LYME FIGHTER - Kim Kirk, who has Lyme disease, is shown with her husband, Gary, who is holding their son, Andrew. Kim is holding daughter, Alexa.

Disease can be serious

By GRACE R. DOVE
Post Staff

With the onset of warm weather and summer's "official" beginning on June 21, many families are spending more time outdoors.

Swimming, birdwatching, fishing, hiking or simply relaxing in the back yard are often on the menu of outdoor activities.

But summer fun can carry a hidden risk: Lyme disease.

A potentially debilitating ailment found in many warm-blooded animals (humans included), Lyme disease is most commonly transmitted by bites from the "deer tick" and Lone Star tick.

Other species of ticks aren't believed to transmit the disease.

All common to the Northeast, these insects live in wooded areas, grassy fields, parks, urban or suburban lawns or any open, grassy places where people take their dogs for a daily romp.

According to Dr. Bernard Healey, epidemiologist for the Pennsylvania Department of Health, one case was reported in Luzerne County in 1989, seven in 1990, six in 1991 and two in 1992. None have been reported so far this year in Luzerne County, Healey said.

"The most noticeable symptom of Lyme disease is the so-called 'bull's-eye rash' around the site of the bite, followed by flu-like symptoms: fatigue, a stiff neck and low-grade fever lasting several weeks," Healey said.

In later stages, it can affect the central nervous system and can lead to facial palsy, meningitis, encephalitis or arthritis.

"This is all permanent damage. It can't be reversed," Healey added.

Early detection of the disease is essential for proper treatment, but since Lyme disease can mimic other ailments, it's often difficult to detect, Healey said.

Treatment includes oral and intravenous antibiotics.

Lyme disease can also affect the family pets and is "definitely on the increase," according to Dr. William Ryan of Fort Dodge Laboratories.

Although veterinarians don't have access to the testing and tracking procedures used by physicians to keep track of diseases, Ryan said that the diagnosis of Lyme disease in pets is becoming more frequent.

People don't have to go into the woods to be exposed Ryan said. Mice, birds and cats also carry the ticks which spread the disease.

Dogs traveling for any reason, whether to shows or competitions or simply on vacation with the family, have also helped the disease's spread.

Symptoms in both dogs and cats include lethargy, loss of appetite, possible rash or swelling around the eyelids, fever, chronic lameness and arthritis, Ryan said.

Diagnosis can be made through a blood test.

Although a vaccine is available for dogs, none is yet available for people.

The best prevention for any outdoor enthusiast is to keep their arms and legs covered while outside and to use a good insect repellent, possibly one containing DEET, Healey said.

Pet owners should keep Rover or Puss well-brushed, check both people and pets for ticks after every outing, use a pyrethrin-based flea/tick powder or spray on family pets and keep the yard free of tall grass and brush to reduce tick contact.

If someone removes a tick from either themselves or a pet, they can call the Pennsylvania Department of Health to find out how to have it identified. The dead tick should be kept in rubbing alcohol in a closed bottle.

Arson

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Township June 2 have definitely been ruled as arson, according to investigating officer Trooper Sylvester Myers of the fire marshal's office.

Police are also investigating an arson attempt Sunday, June 6, on Shaver Ave., Dallas Township, in which gasoline was poured on

the ground alongside the detached garage of a home but not ignited.

Police are continuing to investigate a May 22 fire in the Roushey Plot section of Dallas Township.

Police chief Carl Miers said that he expects to meet with the District Attorney's office concerning a possible suspect later this week.

Report any suspicious activity

Back Mountain police are still investigating the recent string of eight suspicious fires and one arson attempt in Kingston, Franklin and Dallas townships.

Although police have a suspect in at least one arson fire, many of the other arson cases have not yet been solved.

If you have noticed anything unusual or out of the ordinary around places where fires have occurred, police request that you call **675-4650**, the Back Mountain Communications Center's non-emergency telephone number, to report it.

Even partial descriptions of persons or vehicles (try to get as much of the license number as possible) may help.

KT residents reminded to keep their lawns cut

The residents of Kingston Township are reminded that the Township's Vegetation Nuisance Ordinance requires that all grass or weeds on occupied properties are to be kept trimmed to a maximum height of six inches. All

grass or weeds growing in excess of six inches in height may be declared to be a nuisance and subject to a fine. Additional information may be obtained from the Zoning Officer at 696-3809 daily from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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Where to get information

People who want further information on Lyme disease and testing procedures may obtain literature from these agencies:

- Lyme Disease Foundation, Box 462, Tolland, CT 06084-0462.
- Infuserve America: 1-800-886-2568.

Kim Kirk will hold an informational meeting and discuss forming a support group for Lyme disease patients and those interested in Lyme disease Tuesday, July 27, at 7 p.m. at the Fellowship Evangelical Free Church on Hildebrandt Road, Dallas Township. For more information, call Kim at 675-3187.

by Grace R. Dove

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