

Does Lyme exist in Ireland?

Patients are often told that Lyme does not exist in Ireland; this leads to lack of diagnoses & poor tracking of real cases. In 2006 **Dr John McCormack** did a survey amongst GPs in Connemara (i) & found that **19 patients** were being treated for Lyme disease, in his area alone. We believe that many more cases are out there 'under the radar'.

Since 2012, Lyme disease is a **notifiable illness**, but only for stage 3 neuroborreliosis cases (who have positive 2 tier tests). As can be seen from our testing sheet, getting a positive test can be a challenge & therefore under reporting occurs. But does Lyme really exist in Ireland? Let's take a look.

Studies in the 90s (ii) cited **Counties Kerry, Wicklow & Galway as particular hotspots**. Plus a study in 2010 identified **Connemara** (iii) as being endemic for Lyme disease (151 cases per 100,000 over a 5 year period). If we look at yearly averages in this study, cases ranged from 2 per 100,000 in the West of Ireland, with some parts of Connemara reaching 181 cases per 100,000). In comparison the Highlands of Scotland [*an endemic region*] have an average of 81/100,000 (iv) in peak season.

A study in **Killarney National Park**, Co. Kerry (v) cited tick infection rates between 11-29% [*close to a third of ticks may be infected with borrelia (Lyme disease causing bacteria) in certain areas*].

From a study of 30 patients 1999-2004 by **University Hospital Galway** (vi), recent travel outside Ireland was documented in only 7 cases [*therefore three quarters of patients may have been infected in Ireland*].

While twenty-two patients (71%) in the above study had a rash at presentation, **only 43% of patients presented with an EM rash** [*a rash may not always be in rings—in Tick Talk's survey they found a similar rate of only 45% with an Erythema Migrans (EM) rash at the start of illness*].

In a survey by Tick Talk Ireland of 104 patients, when asked which country the tick-borne infection took place, **61% of our respondents were infected in Ireland** & 22% in North America. 17% listed Europe as the source of infection. <http://www.ticktalkireland.org/surveys.html>

During a tick survey it was discovered that: **63% of ticks are being spotted in the West of Ireland**. The most common area for ticks was 21% in Galway, 16% in Cork & 14% in Kerry.

47% of ticks were reported to be found in tall grasses (whilst playing, walking camping etc.) & an **alarming 22% were found in private gardens**. Ticks can be infected by mice, birds, hedgehogs, farm animals & deer therefore the potential for exposure is high among rural areas in Ireland.

Not all ticks carry Lyme disease, however more research is needed to identify where disease clusters are occurring. Prof Gray's retirement from UCD has left the country lacking in current up to date data & without tracking ALL stages of Lyme disease (only stage 3 lab confirmed cases are notifiable) it is considerably difficult to track true numbers of cases.

Sources:

- (i) <https://ticktalkireland.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/lyme-disease-in-connemara-for-upload.doc>
- (ii) <http://www.springerlink.com/content/lv21370236852656/>
- (iii) <http://ticktalkireland.wordpress.com/2011/01/24/lyme-mapping-west-of-ireland/>
- (iv) http://www.rcpe.ac.uk/journal/issue/journal_39_3/milner_mavin_ho-yen.pdf
- (v) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC168399/>
- (vi) <http://lenus.ie/hse/bitstream/10147/112323/1/20666055.pdf>

For more **Irish related** studies go to: <https://ticktalkireland.wordpress.com/irish-related-studies/>