

TOUCHED BY LYME: New CDC stance on Lyme disease?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention made big news this week by [announcing that illnesses from mosquito, tick and flea bites have more than tripled](#) in the United States from 2004 to 2016.

During that period, more than 640,000 cases of vector-borne diseases were reported to the CDC. Three-quarters of that number were for tick-borne diseases. And 82% of the tick-borne cases were due to Lyme disease.

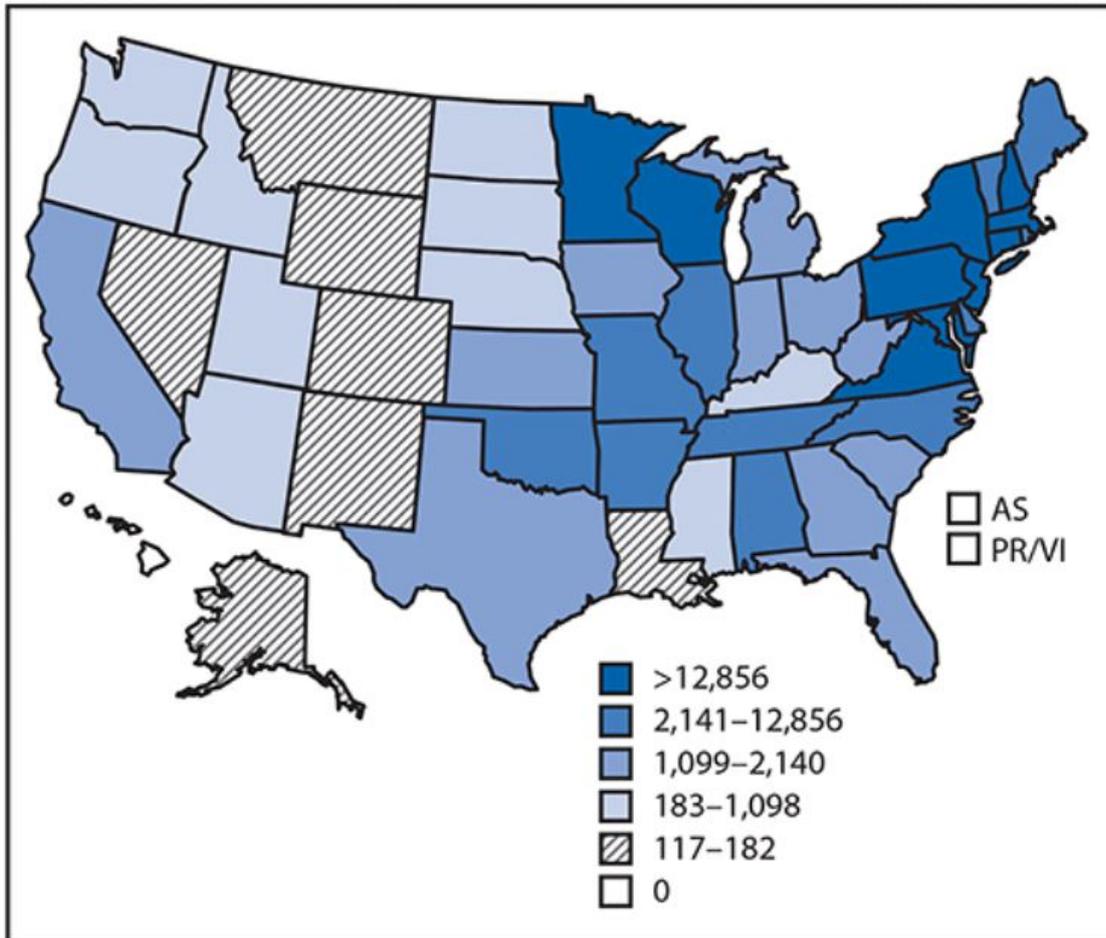
(Of course, we mustn't forget that "reported" means different things to different audiences. In this instance, it means "meets the CDC's strict surveillance criteria." Which is not the same thing as "diagnosed." You can be diagnosed with Lyme, and still not have your case counted by the CDC.)

New maps on the CDC website

Now, take a look at this new map on the CDC website. True, they lump all tick-borne diseases together, but the overall message is that indeed TBDs are a risk throughout the country.

In the past, CDC Lyme maps looked like someone spilled ink on the upper right-hand corner, and the rest of it was pretty much blank. As a result, people with Lyme disease have often been denied that diagnosis by medical professionals who'd say: Look at that map. No Lyme in our state.

FIGURE 1. Reported cases* of tickborne disease – U.S. states and territories, 2004–2016



CDC map, tick-borne diseases in US

Now, the map shows tick-borne diseases in 49 out of 50 states. (We might quibble with the numbers—still way too low—but at least the CDC now acknowledges that there are SOME cases in states that it previously dismissed as being free of TBDs.)

Is this a softening of the CDC's historical policy of minimizing, ignoring and/or downright denying the threat posed by ticks throughout the US? Perhaps. Too soon to tell, really, but it's a tantalizing possibility.

Widespread coverage of CDC announcement

The CDC's announcement, released on the first day of Lyme Awareness Month, garnered attention from the national news media. Here's a sampling worth looking at:

[Tick and Mosquito Infections Spreading Rapidly, CDC Finds](#) (New York Times)

[Diseases spread by ticks, mosquitoes and fleas more than tripled in the U.S. since 2004](#) (Washington Post)

[Zika, Lyme drive big increase in bug-borne disease in US](#) (NBC Nightly News)

The CDC report sparked additional coverage as well. I was pleased to be consulted for a NY Times sidebar article about [how to protect yourself from ticks.](#)

Senator Chuck Schumer called on the CDC to [foot the bill for fighting ticks in New York.](#)

And San Francisco radio station KQED put together an hour-long interview show about the threat of tick-borne diseases in Northern California. Guests included Raphael Stricker MD, who serves on the board of LymeDisease.org; investigative journalist Mary Beth Pfeiffer, author of “Lyme: The First Epidemic of Climate Change”; and biologist/tick researcher Andrea Swei, of San Francisco State University. [You can listen to the podcast here.](#)

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