

New vaccine helps people prevent lyme disease

By CHARLES LAFFERTY

Recently SmithKline Beecham Pharmaceuticals held a seminar at Chelsea Pier, N.Y., to introduce a new vaccine (Lymerix) to combat lyme disease. Anyone who enjoys the outdoors, from the weekend gardener to the avid golfer and fisherman, is at risk of being in-

fectured by Lyme disease.

Former PGA Tour player Tim Simpson spoke of how Lyme disease abruptly ended his career in 1991. The symptoms vary from individual to individual — from flu-like symptoms to bells palsey — and some people are even killed by this disabling disease.

Lyme disease is transmitted to humans via a deer tick bite. The deer tick is found on either the deer or field mice. The deer tick is small and difficult to detect. In fact, some people are unaware of even being bitten by the tick.

Ticks are mainly found in tall grassy wooded areas and are present from spring to late fall. This puts golfers especially at risk when searching for errant shots. Chances are good that the tick carrying lyme disease are present anywhere deer and field mice are found.

Simpson contracted the disease while hunting in Georgia. He awoke at 1 a.m. scratching, only to find more than 300 ticks all over his body. He suffered with varying symptoms for more than one year before doctors diagnosed his condition as lyme disease. This difficulty to diagnose lyme disease is what makes the new vaccination instrumental in the fight against it.

The disease is transmitted when a tick bites the host human and begins to feed on the blood stream.

The tick secretes juices to aid in the digestion process, and this transmits the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The bacteria enters the body and can affect the person immediately, or lay dormant for years before symptoms are experienced.

With the vaccine, the bacteria is actually killed inside the tick before entering the body. Interestingly enough, the tick is then free from the bacteria and can no longer spread lyme disease.

The vaccine is genetically engineered from the outer surface protein of the causative lyme disease bacterium.

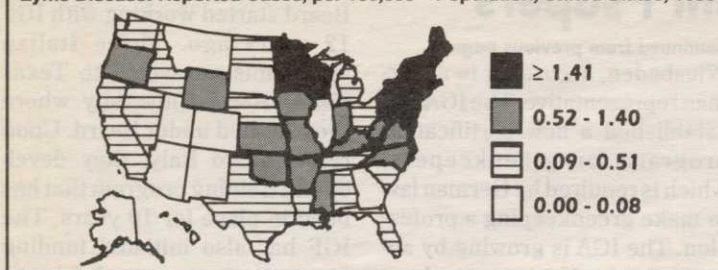
Clinical trials prove the vaccine to be 85 percent effective against lyme disease. This is impressive, considering that flu shots only carry 62-percent effectiveness.

With the Lymerix vaccine, all who enjoy the outdoors should consider the vaccine another tool in the fight against lyme disease. Lymerix is covered by most health-care providers and is given in three visits over a one-year span.

The initial shot is followed by another one month later and the last which is given 12 months from the original shot. It is still not known if any further shots are required due to the recent advent of the vaccination. For any further information, people should contact their physician.

Charles Lafferty is assistant superintendent at Wykagyl Country Club in New Rochelle, N.Y.

Lyme Disease: Reported Cases, per 100,000 — Population, United States, 1996



The extensive existence of deer ticks may be surprising to many people. This map shows the range in which lyme disease cases have been reported.



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