THE TICK CHALLENGE

Raising awareness of Lyme Disease in the Outer Hebrides

Background

In September 2016, NHS Western Isles' Health Protection team identified the need to provide a broad public health response to raise awareness of ticks and prevention of tick bites.

This was in response to Lyme disease being more commonly diagnosed within the Outer Hebrides when compared to the rest of Scotland.

Laboratory-confirmed Lyme Borreliosis in 2017:

Area	Per 100,000 population
Outer Hebrides	30.1
Scotland	3.1
USA	9.5 (average)
Canada	2.6
France	51

Aim

The campaign was aimed at the local community and for those visiting the Outer Hebrides.

Whilst primarily focusing on promoting the safest way to enjoy the outdoors and protect against Lyme disease, the campaign also aimed to ensure information did not deter people from enjoying the unique and stunning local environment.

Methodology

- Produced range of printed resources to bolster the campaign on the safest way to enjoy the outdoors and protect against Lyme disease
- Produced and issued a school lesson plan for local schools.
- Produced and issued information packs to all local schools and nurseries, comprising tick remover and link to BADA-UK film demonstrating correct tick removal.
- Partnership with local authority to provide information mailshot to parents of all island school children.
- Campaign launch held on Isle of South Uist in March 2017 to emphasise the importance of 'tick awareness', generating local and national media interest.
- Widespread resource distribution to GP practices, local businesses, mobile library unit, community halls, airport and ferry terminals and inclusion on all CALMAC ferries travelling to the Outer Hebrides.
- Partnership working with local retail outlets to ensure tick removers were stocked.
- Information stalls throughout summer events and festivals providing information and demonstrations of safe tick removal.
- Fostered close multi-agency partnership working with local authority (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar), CALMAC, BADA-UK, Lyme Disease Action, Uist Deer Management Group, EDF Music Festival, North Uist Tractor Rally and the South Uist Agricultural Show.

Results

- Distribution of first print run of leaflets and posters (further printing required).
- Well attended two-launch events in March and stalls held at both Tractor Rally and South Uist Agricultural Show.
- Over 3300 households reached through school based information mail shot.
- Increase in GP and Emergency Departments attendance for patients presenting for safe tick removal and Erythema Migrans.
- School lesson plan developed, with links to Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes.
- Local and national media interest from press, radio and television with number of statements and interviews provided.
- Co-hosting of national event by NHS Western Isles and Scottish Health Protection Network on Isle of Benbecula to develop public health priority relating to ticks and Lyme disease in the Outer Hebrides and beyond, and to explore possible interventions and next steps. Video conferencing facilities allowed eight peripheral sites across Scotland to join.
- Efforts being made to reduce Lyme disease in Outer Hebrides applauded at Scottish Parliamentary debate on Lyme disease (June 2017).
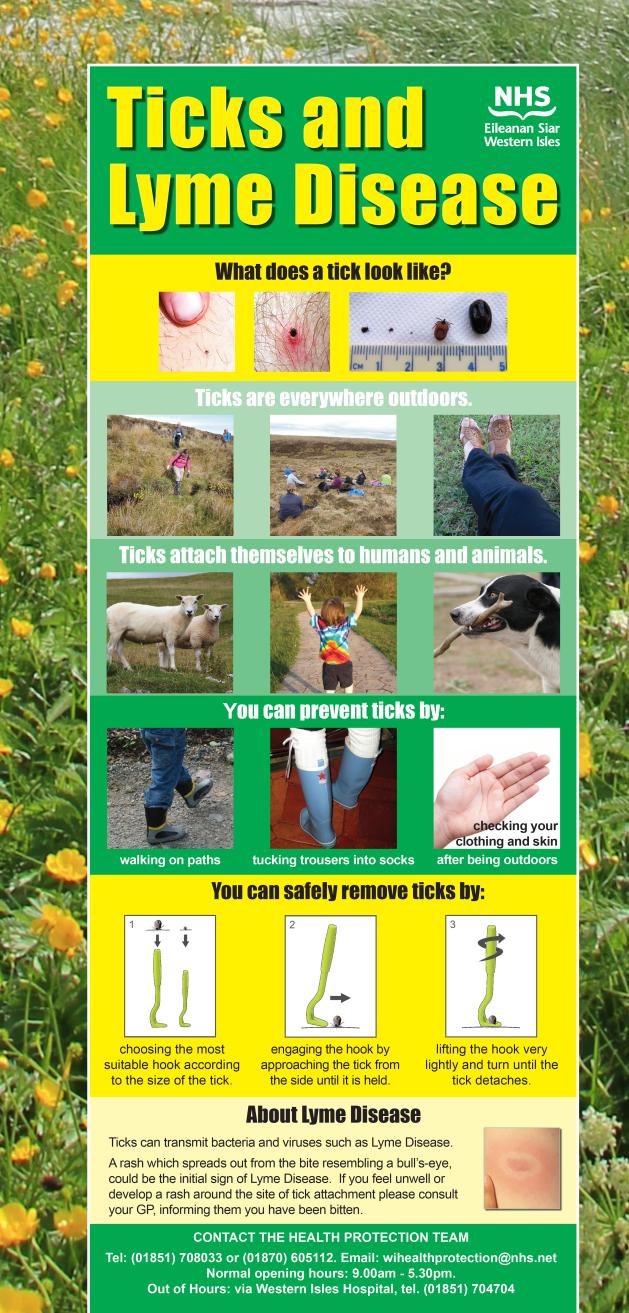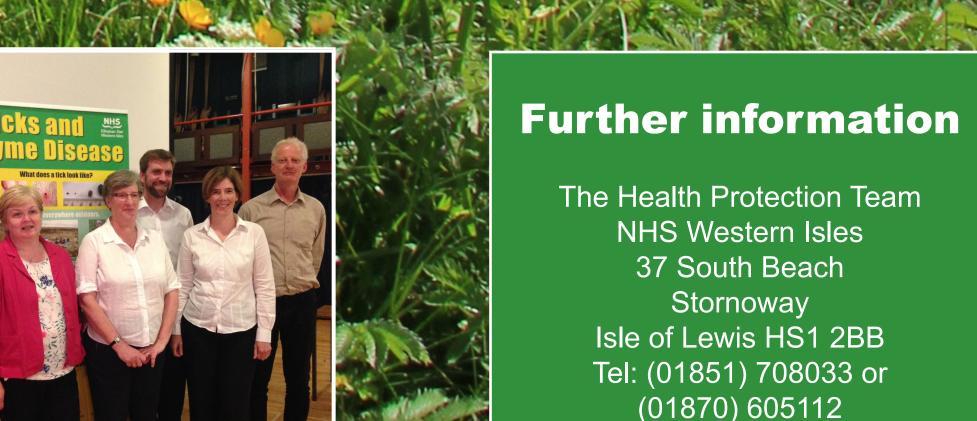
Future Developments

Awareness raising
- To extend information events to the Isles of Lewis and Harris.
- To target workplaces and communities where employees and individuals are at risk of tick exposure eg. stalkers, fish farmers, builders, crofters.
- To develop permanent exterior information boards in areas renowned and used by walkers within the Outer Hebrides.

Wider actions:
- Developing the research agenda.
- Building relationships with academia.
- Further exploration of the ecology and patterns of tick distribution and behaviour.

Further information

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