

# Global warming may increase Lyme disease

By Lynn Peeples, Huffington Post

Darren Collins doesn't know life without Lyme disease. He was just 11 months old when he came home from Wisconsin's Mauthe Lake Campground pasty white, lethargic and running a fever of 105. Darren's flu-like illness eventually subsided, but a host of other troubling Lyme-related symptoms – stomachaches, irritability and concentration problems – have since plagued the boy, now 10.

"He's like Jekyll and Hyde," says his mom, Kristin. One moment Darren could be "happy and smiling," and the next in a "complete rage."

"He scores perfect on a spelling test one week, then gets every word wrong the next week," adds Kristin, a nurse in Waukesha, Wisc. "He wants to know why he can't be like other kids."

Darren Collins holds up a flag with the names of another family afflicted by Lyme. Sisters, Sophie and Stephanie, frequent his chat room; both were too sick to participate in the fundraiser walk.

For now, Darren is settling for finding kids like himself, a group that has grown significantly over the decade since he contracted the disease from a tick bite. And according to experts, there may be a link between these increases and a changing climate.

A quarter of all Lyme disease cases are among children. At highest risk: kids ages 5 to 14, who are more likely to play

outdoors and close to the ground, where ticks are ready to pounce. Darren recently launched an online chat room catering to this group. Every Friday night at 8 p.m. Central, he now talks online with nearly a dozen new friends who log on from as far away as Kentucky and Australia, all living with Lyme.

Overall numbers are on the rise, too. From 2005 to 2010, the number of Wisconsinites contracting Lyme each year jumped from 26 to 44 of every 100,000 people. Around 15,000 cases nationwide were reported to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the mid-1990s. That number is now 30,000 to 40,000, although the CDC admits it could be as much as 12 times higher.

Lyme is just one of a lengthening list of emerging infectious diseases that are soaring in North America. Experts say that increasing temperatures and altered precipitation patterns that accompany climate change are already playing at least a partial role in the spread and intensity of zoonoses – infectious agents that begin in animals and account for an estimated 75 percent of all newly emerging diseases. Cases of West Nile virus reported to the CDC, for example, rose from 21 in 2000 – a year after its arrival in New York City – to more than 1,000 in 2010.

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