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**May is National Lyme Disease Awareness Month and,**

**with More Americans at Home, Infection Exposure is Greater**

**RESTON,** **Va., May 13, 2020—**Although the Centers for Disease Control does not receive reports on everyone contracting Lyme disease, the CDC estimates that there are approximately [329,000 cases per year](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/21/9/15-0417_article). The American Academy of Audiology, working closely with the CDC, warns the public to be vigilant in preventing tick interactions.

In addition to the many diseases and symptoms brought on by tick-born illnesses, the National Center for Biotechnology Information, has studies including one that points to a connection between [Lyme disease and sudden hearing loss](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23303170). A study published in Feb. 2018, [Otolaryngological Symptoms in Patients Treated for Tick-Borne Diseases](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29513260), found tinnitus as one of the most common symptoms. Tinnitus is a symptom that causes ringing or buzzing in the ears. It’s ironic that May is both National Lyme Disease Awareness Month and National Better Hearing Month.

With so many Americans sheltering in place at their homes, there is a greater chance of exposure to ticks and the Lyme disease they may carry as individual venture outside. Reduced human interaction in areas where wildlife is plentiful, has also allowed more wildlife to enter public spaces they may have otherwise avoided when these spaces were populated with people. The result has been large numbers of deer in backyards, public parks, trails, and other public spaces. The white-tailed deer has long been recognized as a main host for deer ticks—main carriers of Lyme disease.

“Anyone working or spending time outdoors should take precautions to prevent contact with ticks,” cautioned Catherine Palmer, Ph.D. president of the American Academy of Audiology and audiology program director in the University of Pittsburgh's School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. “And anyone who has been spending time outdoors and has experienced sudden hearing loss, should be tested for Lyme.”  The CDC also cautions that, in some cases, untreated Lyme disease can lead to brain or nerve problems. In an effort to help consumers, the CDC has created a [Lyme toolkit](https://www.cdc.gov/lyme/toolkit/index.html).

[The CDC is also tracking the explosive growth of ticks](https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/pubs/vector-borne-disease-final_508.pdf) and attributes much of this growth to climate change. Numbers of ticks are growing in regions that have not had large numbers in the past and, in many areas, the hard freezes that used to kill them in winter are no longer prevalent.

For Teresa Jennings, 59, Lyme disease played a role in her hearing loss. While executive director of the Barrington Park District in Barrington, Ill., she was diagnosed with Lyme disease in 2011. With multiple symptoms including chronic fatigue, her hearing in both ears also began to severely decline. She received medical treatment for her illness but her hearing ability did not return. An MRI confirmed that she had neurological Lyme disease. She first pursued hearing aids from a big-box discount store. What Teresa didn’t understand at the time is that not only is it important to have a good amplification device, it is essential that the output of the device is tuned individually considering the individuals physical ear characteristics and hearing loss.

When Jennings was in danger of losing her job from hearing loss (the device and care she received did not provide the functionality that she needed) she went to an audiologist who used evidence-based practice to custom fit devices and she was finally able to hear again. With audiologic rehabilitation and customized and professionally programmed hearing aids, Jennings was able to fully return to her job and her normal productivity.

“Working with an audiologist to ensure hearing aids are the correct device and proper fit is extremely important,” stated Palmer. “Anyone experiencing hearing loss should seek care from an audiologist.”

For more information on the American Academy of Audiology or to find an audiologist, visit [www.howsyourhearing.org](http://www.howsyourhearing.org).

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The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. Representing the interests of approximately 14,000 audiologists nationwide, the Academy is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to [www.howsyourhearing.org](http://www.howsyourhearing.org).

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