

# SCHUMER URGES TICK VIGILANCE

## Report calls diseases year-round threat

BY DELTHIA RICKS  
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Ticks do not die off in fall and winter as once largely believed, which means the disease-carrying creatures must be fought year-round, Sen. Chuck Schumer said Monday.

Schumer (D-N.Y.) released the findings of a new Working Group Report, which took two years to craft, by a national panel of medical, public health and scientific experts. The Working Group called tick-borne diseases a serious threat and emphasized the need for better methods of detecting tick-transmitted infections and developing a vaccine against Lyme disease, the most prevalent tick-borne condition.

He told Newsday on Monday that he is calling on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to act on the Working Group's directives. He wants more research, better medical treatment and more comprehensive physician and public education about tick-borne infections.

"We need better diagnostic tests. The ones we have now have too many false negatives and false positives," said Schumer, the Senate minority leader. "And, unfortunately, we still have a large number of physicians who don't recognize the subtler symptoms of Lyme disease."

"New York is the epicenter of Lyme disease. We have more Lyme than any other state, and probably any other place in the world," added Schumer, who had a tick-transmitted bacterial infection a decade ago after walking through a brushy area of the Hudson Valley inspecting dams.

His call for a greater emphasis on ticks and tick-borne diseases comes as a



Long Island is home to many tick species.

HOWARD SCHNAPP

new tick — the Longhorned — has spread throughout New York, including Long Island, said Jody Gangloff-Kaufmann, an urban entomologist with the Cornell Cooperative Extension in Babylon.

The tick reproduces through parthenogenesis — cloning itself — and has a reputation for feeding on livestock en masse, draining animals of their blood. The tick has been found in Suffolk County, she said, but is not yet associated with carrying or transmitting a pathogen. The tick is believed to have originated in China.

Schumer said doctors and scientists have to be aware of ticks' year-round threat. In August, he announced the first federal funding for Lyme disease in five years, money secured in a budget amendment that he authored. The \$12 million funding boost was aimed at bolstering tick surveillance and disease prevention.

### Educating doctors

Next spring, a series of symposia under the auspices of Stony Brook University's Renaissance School of Medicine will be aimed at educating primary care physicians about tick-transmitted infections, said Dr. Luis Marcos, a specialist in internal medicine and infectious diseases.

The web-based instructional sessions will be designed primarily for private-practice doctors who are usually the first medical professionals to encounter patients with Lyme or other tick-borne infections, Marcos said.

"We just got the grant from the state and we want to start them in March and April of next year," Marcos said of the sessions, adding Suffolk residents disproportionately suffer from tick-borne illnesses.

### High infection rate

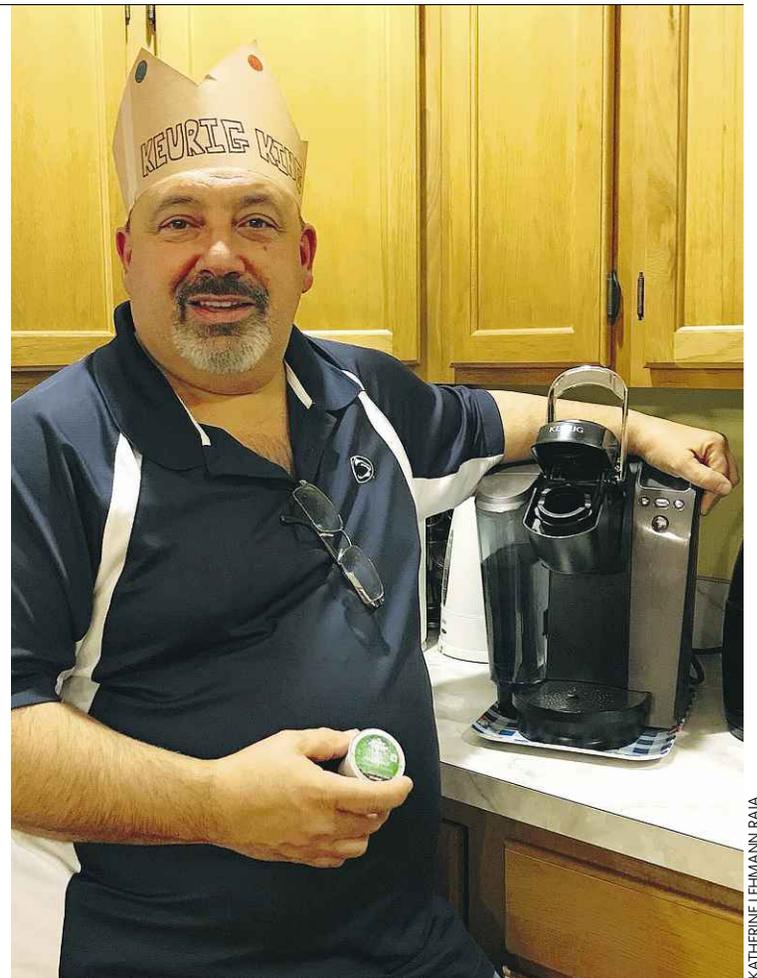
He specified Monday that Suffolk has the highest number of tick-borne infections nationwide. Marcos attributed the infection rate to the region's deeply forested and brushy terrain and its abundance of animals that harbor ticks — deer and white-footed mice.

The New York State Department of Health tallied 128 cases of Lyme disease in Nassau County in 2017 and 523 in Suffolk. Those numbers do not reflect the actual number, experts say, because milder cases often go undiagnosed.

Dr. David Hirschwerk, an infectious diseases specialist at both North Shore University Hospital and Long Island Jewish Medical Center, said Lyme is only one of multiple diseases transmitted by ticks.

Beyond the Lyme bacterium, ticks on Long Island have been found to harbor babesia and anaplasma. Babesia are protozoa, or parasitic, infectious agents that hone in on red blood cells, similar to the way a malaria parasite invades the same cells.

Anaplasmosis is an infection caused by the bacterium *Anaplasma phagocytophilum*. It can trigger aches, fever, chills and confusion.



KATHERINE LEHMANN RAI

Vincent A. Raia Jr. wears a crown a neighbor gave to celebrate his feat.

## Video of coffee stunt goes viral

BY LISA IRIZARRY  
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A video of an East Setauket man dropping a K-Cup from his bald head straight into his Keurig coffee machine and screaming with delight has gone viral, with more than 9 million Twitter views since being posted last week.

Vincent A. Raia Jr., 55, who sells dental equipment, said it was last December when he decided he couldn't wait for his coffee water to boil without somehow occupying his mind — or his head — in the meantime. He tried (unsuccessfully) to land the cup from his head for about a month, but scored it on the first try once he decided to record his efforts. In the video, he's seen in his kitchen with his wife, who calls him a "jerk" for performing such antics.

But the video didn't get past the cellphone of his 22-year-old daughter, Kaleigh, for a year until fellow students at Penn State, where she's a food science major, convinced her to post it on her Twit-

ter page as she was clearing photos from her phone Thursday.

Raia said he showed the video to friends and family last December but thought that was the end of it. Then on his way up to see Kaleigh at college he and his wife got a text about all the "likes" Kaleigh was getting on the 11-second video.

"This dude does not need coffee," one Twitter comment said.

"I don't have Twitter or Instagram, so I didn't know anything about it — I had sent that video out a year ago," Raia said in a telephone interview Monday. On Instagram it received more than 3 million views. "Once we got to Penn State it was like the buzz. It's insane how it blew up."

Raia said his "five minutes of fame" also resulted in a neighbor making him a paper crown that reads, "Keurig King" to "cap my perfect weekend."

And he's learned the trick is not easily replicated. "Now, I just do it for fun," he said. "Usually lands 1 out of 10 times."