



Pennsylvania
Department of Health



Pennsylvania
**Department of Conservation
& Natural Resources**



Pennsylvania
Department of Environmental Protection

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, May 14, 2026

MEDIA CONTACTS: Neil Ruhland, DOH, ra-dhpressoffice@pa.gov
Wesley Robinson, DCNR, w robinson@pa.gov
ra-epnews@pa.gov

Art of Staying Safe: Shapiro Administration Honors 18 Student Winners in Fight Against Lyme Disease

Contest raises awareness of Lyme disease and other tickborne illnesses and encourages Pennsylvanians to take simple steps to avoid ticks when enjoying our great outdoors.

Harrisburg, PA – The Shapiro Administration recognized 18 students from across the Commonwealth today who submitted entries to the 2026 **“Protect. Check. Remove.” Lyme Disease Student Art Competition** that promotes awareness of ticks and encourages Pennsylvanians to take simple steps before safely enjoying our great outdoors.

The event included leaders from the **departments of Health (DOH), Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and Environmental Protection (DEP).**

“As a pediatrician, I know that playing and spending time outdoors is an important part of a healthy childhood—but so is protection. The students participating in the Lyme art contest aren't just making art; they are using it to spur important conversation about preventing Lyme disease and other tick-borne

illnesses,” said **Secretary of Health Dr. Debra Bogen**. “The Shapiro Administration is committed to ensuring Pennsylvanians know how to keep themselves safe outdoors, and that means families taking the lead. Don’t let a tick bite ruin your season: wear repellent, cover up, and make tick checks a part of your daily routine. It takes 60 seconds to prevent a very serious illness.”

The Lyme Disease Awareness Student Art Competition is an annual educational initiative that teaches students about where ticks are found, how to prevent tick bites, and the symptoms of Lyme disease.

More than 145 students in first through sixth grades across the Commonwealth submitted posters and videos to the Department of Health in March 2026.

The winning artwork will be on display in the Pennsylvania State Capitol’s East Wing, outside the Senate Fountain Area, through the end of May.

“Enjoying Pennsylvania’s great outdoors is a great way to celebrate America250, and we want to encourage people to be smart when it comes to protecting themselves from ticks and Lyme disease. This year’s winners of the Lyme Disease Awareness Student Art have created great reminders of how to stay safe and enjoy the Penn’s woods,” said **DEP Secretary Jessica Shirley**. “DEP’s Tick Surveillance program helps monitor tick populations throughout the Commonwealth and test them for diseases like Lyme disease. Commonsense prevention can keep people from getting bit and getting sick.”

“The Shapiro Administration recognizes the importance of raising awareness through this creative competition which teaches young Pennsylvanians how to prevent exposure to ticks and Lyme disease when enjoying the outdoors,” said **DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn**. “Whether it is visiting one of our 125 state parks and 2.2 million acres of state forestlands, or hiking on Pennsylvania’s 14,000 miles of trails or spending time at one of the Commonwealth’s 6,500 local parks, we know that safe outdoor recreation starts with understanding the best tick prevention practices and using personal protective equipment. Thank you to the participants and partners for promoting Lyme disease awareness.”

A total of 12 posters and three video submissions were selected from the following grades:

First and second grade winners:

- 1st place: Malorie Spiece, Columbia County
- 2nd place: Alexandra King, Bucks County
- 3rd place: Shaina KaPoor, Chester County
- Honorable mention: Thalia Sawycky, Bucks County

Third and fourth grade winners:

- 1st place: Anwitha Ajith, Chester County
- 2nd place: Novalee Andrzejczak, Erie County
- 3rd place: Sanchari Roy, Chester County
- Honorable mention: Valkyrie Lindberg, Berks County

Fifth and sixth grade winners:

- 1st place: Henry Tobias, Lebanon County
- 2nd place: Sid Ghatta, Chester County
- 3rd place: Ella McCunney, Zara Vázquez, and Priya Carrasco, Chester County
- Honorable mention: Jaelynn Bennett, Lebanon County

Video contest participants:

- Chester County: Josephine and Morigan Kelly
- Erie County: Abe Pomeroy
- Lancaster County: Lily Doty

Pennsylvania typically ranks in the top 10 in the country for Lyme disease cases. Most cases of Lyme disease can be treated successfully with antibiotics. However, if left untreated, the infection can spread to joints, the heart, and the nervous system.

Ticks are found in urban and rural settings, usually in shrubs, weeds, leaf litter, and tall grasses, but they can be found anywhere there is foliage. So, taking the proper steps to reduce the risk of being bitten is important.

Tips for Tick Bite Prevention

When outside, cover exposed skin and use an EPA-approved insect repellent for tick prevention. Before spending time outdoors, spray permethrin on shoes, clothes, and gear.

After being outside, check yourself, your children, and your pets thoroughly for ticks and remove any you find. Then, shower to help remove any ticks that are not yet attached that you may have missed. You can also throw your clothes in the dryer using high heat to help kill any remaining ticks.

In addition to holding the art contest, and to better inform Pennsylvanians about tickborne diseases, DOH manages an [online dashboard](#), so residents can see where tickborne diseases are prevalent. The dashboard helps Pennsylvanians take appropriate precautions while enjoying outdoor activities.

For more information on Lyme disease, visit the Department of Health's [Tickborne Diseases webpage](#).