Risk Communication, Behaviour Change and Tick-Borne Disease in the UK

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Background and Introduction
Improved knowledge of the basic protective behaviours that can be taken to reduce tick bites decreases the risk of tick-borne disease1. In the case of Lyme disease, our understanding of the tick vector life cycle and the effectiveness of prevention strategies should make it a largely preventable illness, yet the incidence of the disease continues to increase2. Low uptake of protective behaviours among the general public lies at the heart of this problem. Observational studies conducted in areas with endemic tick-borne disease repeatedly find that a large proportion of people fail to take even the most basic of precautions such as wearing long trousers, using repellent or avoiding locations of highest risk3, 4. This finding is echoed in national surveys5. Meanwhile, self-reported checking for ticks after potential exposure is also low6.

One factor that has not yet been explored in relation to encouraging uptake of tick-related behaviours is the role of disgust. Recent research suggests that promoting a sense of disgust can play a key role in improving uptake of several health-related behaviours7. Incorporating messages about ticks that portray them as ‘disgusting’ may be effective in encouraging the uptake of protective behaviours. This project will explore and understand the uptake of tick protective behaviours and investigate the role that psychological theories of behaviour change can play in increasing uptake.

Objectives
1 Identify knowledge and perceptions of risk concerning tick-borne disease in the UK associated with uptake of health protective behaviour relating to ticks
2 Design new communication materials to promote uptake of health protective behaviours relating to ticks
3 Pilot test communication materials designed to increase uptake of health protective behaviours relating to ticks

Methods

Preliminary Results and Conclusions

Expert recommended behaviour
- Wear long trousers
- Tuck trousers into socks
- Use tick repellent
- Stick to clear pathways
- Perform tick checks
- Early and correct tick removal
- Awareness of symptoms

Behaviour predictors
- Social norms / acceptability
- Personal comfort
- Health concerns
- Awareness / knowledge
- Time and cost
- Disgust

Coming Up:
Is there a role for disgust in tick protective behaviour promotion?