



# Health Awareness

## Taking A Bite Out Of Lyme

(NAPSA)—While many viewers may know actress Mary McDonnell as President Laura Roslin on the 2006 Peabody Award-winning TV show “Battlestar Galactica” or as Kevin Costner’s love interest in the movie “Dances With Wolves,” few people know that offscreen, as the national spokesperson for the Lyme Disease Association, she works to build awareness of Lyme disease and its devastating effects.

Lyme disease, the most common vector-borne disease in the United States, is contracted from the bite of a bacteria-infected tick. In humans, infection with Lyme disease bacteria can lead to problems related to the nervous system, heart, joints, eyes and even the brain.

“Lyme disease can physically, mentally and emotionally devastate entire families, and the economic burden is overwhelming,” McDonnell says. “However, a little awareness can go a long way in preventing that devastation.”

McDonnell first became aware of Lyme disease in 1997 when her cousin’s husband, Jim Loughran, was diagnosed. Loughran’s experience with Lyme disease began as many cases do: A bull’s-eye rash appeared on his left thigh but a doctor reassured him that it was just a spider bite and was nothing to worry about. One year later, his symptoms progressed and he



tested positively for Lyme disease. Tragically, Loughran’s health continued to deteriorate and when he passed away almost four years later, his autopsy showed Lyme disease in his brain and spine.

Stories like Loughran’s are all too common. More than 230,000 Americans develop Lyme disease each year. It is the most prevalent vector-borne disease in the U.S. Symptoms vary, but may include fever, chills, headache, backache, fatigue and—as in Loughran’s case—a bull’s-eye rash.

According to the Lyme Disease Association, quick diagnosis and appropriate treatment of Lyme disease are critical in preventing chronic disease. People with Lyme disease usually recover if diagnosed and treated early with proper antibiotics. However, according to a Columbia Univer-

sity study funded by the National Institutes of Health, on average, patients with chronic Lyme disease have symptoms for more than one year before being correctly diagnosed.

One obstacle to quick diagnosis is that the test results for Lyme disease are often unreliable. For example, it’s possible to test negative but actually have the disease.

“Someone who is concerned that they may have contracted Lyme disease should seek a medical evaluation from a Lyme-literate physician,” urges Pat Smith, president of the New Jersey-based national Lyme Disease Association. “A physician who has experience treating Lyme patients can make a diagnosis based on symptoms and history, and not on test results alone.”

And, as McDonnell reiterates, awareness of Lyme disease is critical every step of the way.

“The most important thing we need to know about Lyme disease is that failure to recognize and treat Lyme may result in tragic consequences for loved ones,” McDonnell says. “Lyme can be treated successfully. We need to face up to this disease and conquer the ignorance.”

More information about Lyme disease can be found on the Web at [www.lymediseaseassociation.org](http://www.lymediseaseassociation.org) or [www.timeforlyme.org](http://www.timeforlyme.org).