

High number of Lyme disease diagnoses through the winter in England

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In the *British Journal of General Practice*, Cooper and colleagues discuss their results which are based on hospital episode statistics (HES) data in England from the Health and Social Care Information Centre. [1] The geographic location was based on the patient's postcode. Patients may have been admitted more than once.

The study reported a high number of hospital diagnoses all year. But also “appears to demonstrate a high level of diagnoses, through winter, which may reflect milder winters with recent climate change.”

“Although there are areas of the country where Lyme disease is thought to be endemic, there is limited knowledge about who gets it, where, and when,” states Cooper. “A heightened awareness of risk may facilitate appropriate prophylaxis, diagnosis, and treatment.” The authors were not able to provide details as to why the number of diagnoses was so great during the winter months, since the input was based on non-clinical coders.

The authors suggest that healthcare practitioners in the UK consider Lyme disease not only in the summer but in winter months, as the climate changes.

The high number of hospital diagnoses might also have reflected manifestations of Lyme disease other than an erythema migrans rash. It would be helpful to continue addressing the growing number of Lyme disease cases identified in England using hospital episode statistics.

References:

1. Cooper L, Branagan-Harris M, Tuson R, Nduka C. Lyme disease and Bell's palsy: an epidemiological study of diagnosis and risk in England. *Br J Gen Pract*. 2017.

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