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**Pediatric
Lyme Disease**

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Does Lyme disease turn "A" students into failing students? Can it render athletic kids wheelchair-bound or transform happy children into suicidal children? The answer is yes. This puzzling infection has been called "the new great imitator" (syphilis was the previous great imitator) because it causes vague, flu-like symptoms and a circular rash that is easy to miss. Lyme disease can both look like and lead to learning disabilities, mood disturbances, depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder, and even manic or psychotic behavior. Experts do not yet know with certainty how Lyme disease wreaks havoc on the brain.

Researchers aren't certain how frequently *Borrelia burgdorferi* -- the corkscrew-shaped bacteria that causes Lyme disease -- attacks the brain or nervous system. Dr. Brian Fallon, an associate professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia University and director of its Lyme Disease Research Program, estimates that if diagnosed and treated early, less than five percent of sufferers will develop brain or nerve complications -- a condition known as neuroborreliosis. If left undiagnosed and untreated, the Lyme bacterium may attack the brain or nerves in as many as 40 to 50 percent of patients. The Lyme bacterium can attack the brain within weeks to years after first infection, causing meningitis symptoms including stiff neck, headache, light sensitivity, and fatigue. Over time, vague symptoms such as thinking difficulties, school performance problems, and mood changes can develop.

Our kids are at risk. Children love to roll around in grass, dive into piles of leaves, and explore the woods. These outdoor amusements, unfortunately, also take place in environments very friendly to the deer ticks that transmit Lyme disease. Children as young as 1 or

2 years of age are getting Lyme disease, according to the Center for Disease Control Lyme Disease Program, which suggests ticks may also be found in maintained areas of the yard. Avoid thick brush, overgrown grass, marshes, leaf and woodpiles, and gardens. Even beaches can harbor ticks. If your child does go to a high risk area, be sure they wear protective clothing including light colored clothing so ticks are easily spotted, long sleeves buttoned at the cuff, long pants tucked into the socks, and a hat.

Although summer and fall have passed, Lyme disease is still here. So please remember, that if you know of a child with Lyme disease in need of financial help, contact me or any member of the Lyme Disease Foundation Board and remember: The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. In this case the main thing is our children.

Thank you to all the Kiwanis members, Circle K, Key Club, and Builders Club members who have taken time to care and share through fundraising, donations and by honoring someone with a Brittany Fellowship. Without you none of what we do would be possible.