

LYME DISEASE IN BELLUNO - A NORTH-EASTERN ITALIAN PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

Lyme borreliosis (LB) has a world-wide distribution and may be seen where ixodes ticks are found. *Ixodes ricinus* is the vector: ticks have been found in the mountains and *Borrelia burgdorferi* was isolated from the vector. Our survey focuses on Belluno Province in Veneto Region, an Alpine mountain Region in the North-East of Italy. Data on LB reported from 1977 to 1993 were examined according to incidence, localization and seasonal distribution of ticks-bites as well as age and sex of the patients. LB diagnosis was made in 284 subjects: in 256 cases infection occurred in Belluno Province and in 28 cases outside of the Province. In 178 cases (63%) the diagnosis was made in Dermatologic Out-Patient's Department. The disease was recognized by the presence of erythema migrans (EM).

LB prevalence has been increasing from 10/ 100 000 in 1988 to 29/ 100 000 in 1992. Most of the people who developed borreliosis were in the 40-70 age range, 53% were females. The authors suppose that roe deers are mainly responsible for spreading LB in the Belluno Province.

KEY WORDS

Lyme borreliosis, Belluno, Italy, roe deer

INTRODUCTION

The disease is named Lyme disease or Lyme borreliosis (LB) after an unusual outbreak of arthritis took place near the city Lyme (Connecticut, USA) in 1977 (1,2). Our survey focuses on the Belluno Province, an Alpine mountain region in the North-East of Italy (Figure 1). It is a hilly district at the foot of the Dolomites with wooded and grazing land. Villages are usually located in the mountains and they are surrounded by fields. Deciduous trees

followed by conifers and grassland are situated at 700-1000 meters above the sea level, where no major settlement is located. Agriculture and stock-farming, major industries of the past, have now been superseded by new activities, like handicraft industries, services and tourism. This new environment modified the approach and the relationship between the people and the surrounding wildlife.

We collected and analyzed all available data on LB reported cases in the region from 1977 to 1993.

