



## Northeast District Department of Health

69 South Main Street, Unit 4, Brooklyn, CT 06234 860-774-7350 / Fax 860-774-1308 [www.nddh.org](http://www.nddh.org)

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### MEMO

To: NDDH District Town Leaders, School Superintendents, School Nurses, Community-at-large

From: Linda Colangelo, NDDH Education and Communications Coordinator

Date: Thursday, May 4, 2017

RE: **Gypsy Moths**

The Northeast District Department of Health is receiving multiple inquiries regarding the recent hatching of gypsy moth eggs. **There is no public health threat associated with this natural, temporary phenomenon.** We have received the following information from our partners at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven:

#### The Process

- The gypsy moth eggs started hatching the last week of April, so these small larval “instars” (i.e., stages of the caterpillar) are “ballooning” off of the trees and the wind is carrying them to multiple locations.
- This ballooning stage will not last long. In a couple of weeks, older caterpillars will settle into the trees to feed, crawling up and down, and eventually deforest the tree.
- There is a natural fungus with long-lasting spores located toward the bottom of the tree and soil. The fungus requires rain to germinate, infect, and kill the caterpillars. However, due to the drought we have been experiencing, we have not had enough rain the past two years to allow the fungus to germinate.
- This is a temporary phenomenon. It may take a while for nature to catch up, but there are good odds that the issue will take care of itself.

#### Reaction to Exposure

- Gypsy moth larvae (i.e., caterpillars) do not bite. They do have two types of hair (called setae) that they use to defend themselves which can create a stinging sensation. Reactions to these stinging hairs vary from mild to moderately severe itching with an accompanying rash, similar to contact dermatitis.
- The onset of discomfort is usually noticed within 8-12 hours after contact, often becoming more pronounced 1-2 days later. Most cases resolve in a few days or up to 2 weeks.
- Delayed hypersensitivity reactions sometimes result in irritation to the eyes, inflammation of the nasal passages, and shortness of breath. This is especially common in the case of airborne hairs of adult gypsy moths, or contact with clothes hanging on outdoor lines when the moth is locally abundant.
- Exposure to the larvae and hairs is more likely while the young larvae are “ballooning” or contact w/ the adults.

#### What You Can Do

- There are no state programs for spraying, so we recommend that people with sensitivities limit their exposure.
- Rains are forecast for this next weekend (May 5-7). We should start to see germination of the resting spores of the gypsy moth fungus. While we usually notice the fungus hitting the older caterpillars as they move up and down the tree, it can affect the younger instars as well, providing optimism that the fungus will provide natural control of the gypsy moth caterpillars this year.
- **If you have any medical concerns, check with your primary health care provider.**

For more information: CT DEEP: [http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2697&q=588404&deepNav\\_GID=1631](http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2697&q=588404&deepNav_GID=1631)  
Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station: <http://www.ct.gov/caes/cwp/view.asp?a=2826&Q=588414&PM=1>

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