

Watauga County Communicable Disease Update

TRENDS, UPDATES & IMPORTANT POINTS

- In recent weeks the CDC recommended two new Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccines for adults age 60 and up. The single-dose vaccines, one developed by Pfizer and the other developed by GSK, are expected to be available to the public this fall.
- Watauga residents had **29.8 times** the risk of getting Lyme disease as compared to the rest of North Carolina in 2022 (95% CI 21.4, 41.6).
- In Watauga County in recent years, the number of people who contract Lyme disease has been the highest between the months of June and October.
 - Practice tick safety and prevention, know how to properly remove a tick, and remember that if you experience changes in your health following a tick bite to reach out to your doctor, or call our AppHealthCare Call Center at (828) 795-1970.

Lyme Disease and Tick Borne Disease in Watauga County

Lyme disease is the most common vector-borne disease in the United States, and is transmitted by deer ticks (blacklegged ticks). While it is normally associated with the North Eastern United States, in the North Carolina High Country we have exceptionally high rates of Lyme disease that are much higher than the rest of our state.

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The risk of getting Lyme disease in North Carolina in 2022 was **2.8 cases** per 100,000 (95% CI 0.002495, 0.00313), where the risk of getting Lyme disease in Watauga County in the same timeframe was **72.6 cases** per 100,000 people (95% CI 0.05307, 0.09911).

Lyme Disease Symptoms and Outcomes

- Early signs of Lyme disease include: fever, chills, headache, fatigue, muscle and joint aches, swollen lymph nodes, and rash. Bulls-eye rashes only occurs in 70–80% of cases, and can take up to 30 days to appear. Untreated Lyme disease can lead to a variety of symptoms including severe headaches and neck stiffness, additional rashes, arthritis with severe joint pain and swelling, particularly in large joints, and facial palsy and heart conditions associated with Lyme carditis.
- Seek help from a doctor if you develop symptoms following a tick bite, or if you have a change in health that aligns with any of the symptoms of Lyme disease.

Prevention

Reducing exposure to ticks can help preventing Lyme disease. Prevention measures include:

- Wearing permethrin-treated clothes when spending time outdoors, including when on walks, gardening, and hiking. On average you can apply to clothes once and wash them 5 times before needing to reapply permethrin spray
- Use insect repellents containing DEET or picaridin (see EPA for registered sprays)
- Check skin for ticks daily and shower soon after returning indoors
- Check pets for ticks before they return indoors, even if they are on tick preventatives

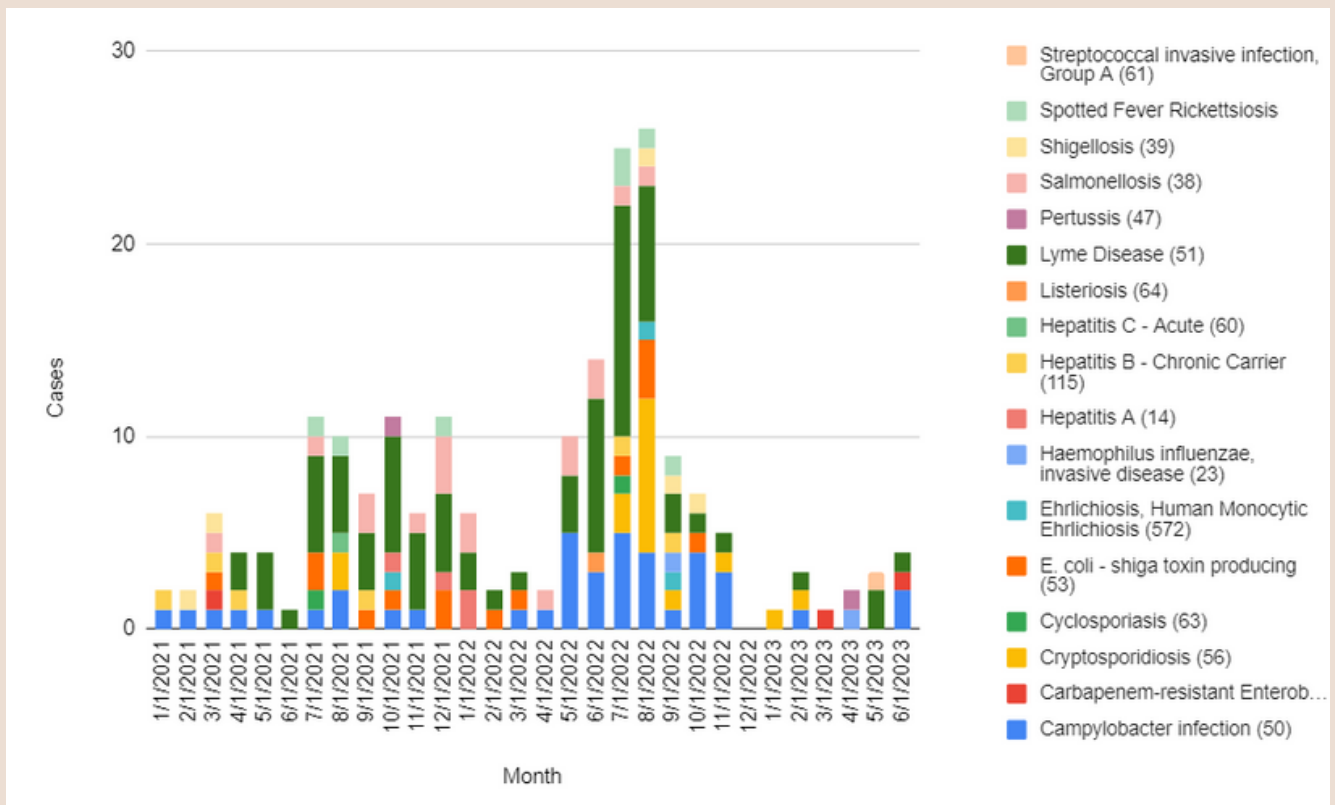
Watauga County General Communicable Disease Data

Data from the North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System, accessed 7/7/2023

Communicable diseases are illnesses that spread from one person to another or from the environment to a person, including from animals, surfaces, food or water, respiratory droplets, bodily fluids, and bugs. Because communicable diseases can have so much impact on the population, the surveillance and control of such diseases is an important part of protecting the public's health.

The figures below represent reportable general communicable disease cases in residents of Watauga County by month, excluding COVID-19 and sexually transmitted infections.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CASES IN WATAUGA COUNTY BY MONTH



The data in recent months may be incomplete due to delays in testing and reporting.

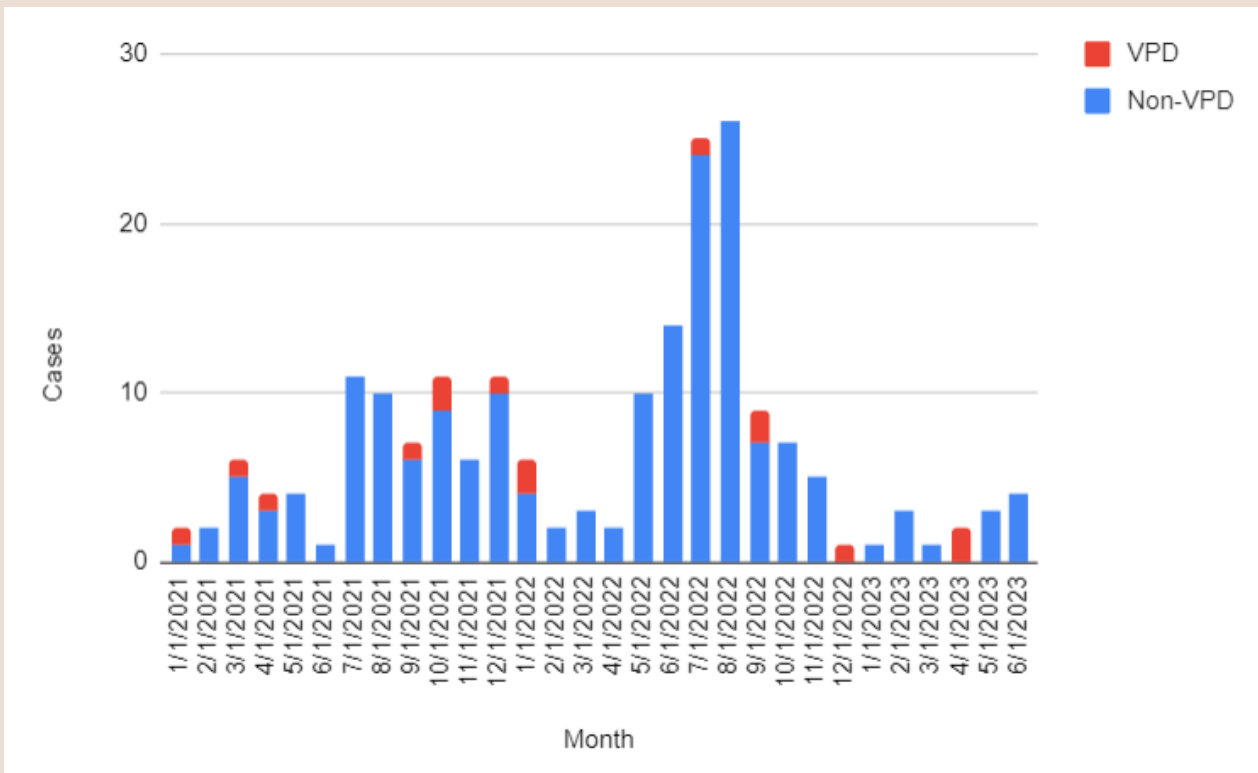
Watauga County Vaccine Preventable Disease Data

Data from the North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System, accessed 7/7/2023

Vaccines prevent disease and disease transmission in the people who receive them and also in the broader community. Because of childhood vaccination programs, diseases like polio, measles, diphtheria, rubella, mumps, and tetanus are no longer widespread in the United States. However, cases and outbreaks of these diseases continue to occur due to travel to and from areas with lower vaccine coverage. Many diseases however are not preventable through vaccines, including but not limited to Lyme disease, rocky mountain spotted fever, and salmonella.

The figures below represent vaccine preventable disease (VPD) cases in residents of Watauga County by month, as compared to general non-VPD cases (excluding COVID-19 and sexually transmitted infections).

VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASE CASES IN WATAUGA COUNTY BY MONTH



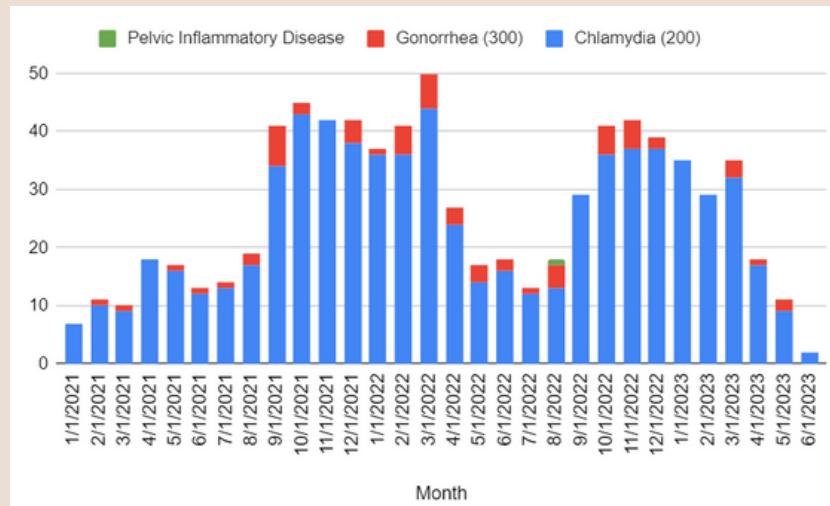
The data in recent months may be incomplete due to delays in testing and reporting.

Watauga County Sexually Transmitted Infection Data

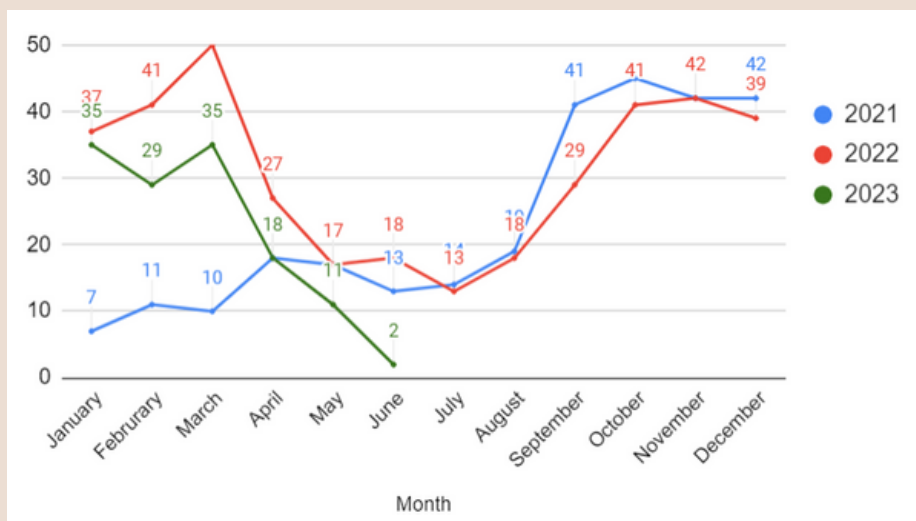
Data from the North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System, accessed 7/7/2023

In North Carolina, there are eight reportable bacterial sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including gonorrhea, chlamydia, and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Chlamydia is the most prevalent STI in Watauga County, with gonorrhea as the second most prevalent. AppHealthCare provides clinical services, education and awareness efforts and monitoring disease trends through surveillance and epidemiology. To best prevent the spread of STIs, seek treatment if relevant, seek free routine testing, and take precautions to promote safety. The figures below represent STI cases in residents of Watauga County by month.

REPORTABLE SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTION CASES IN WATAUGA COUNTY BY TYPE AND MONTH



REPORTABLE SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTION CASES IN WATAUGA COUNTY BY YEAR



The data in recent months may be incomplete due to delays in testing and reporting.

North Carolina COVID-19 and Respiratory Surveillance Updates

Data from the CDC and NCDHHS, accessed 7/7/2023

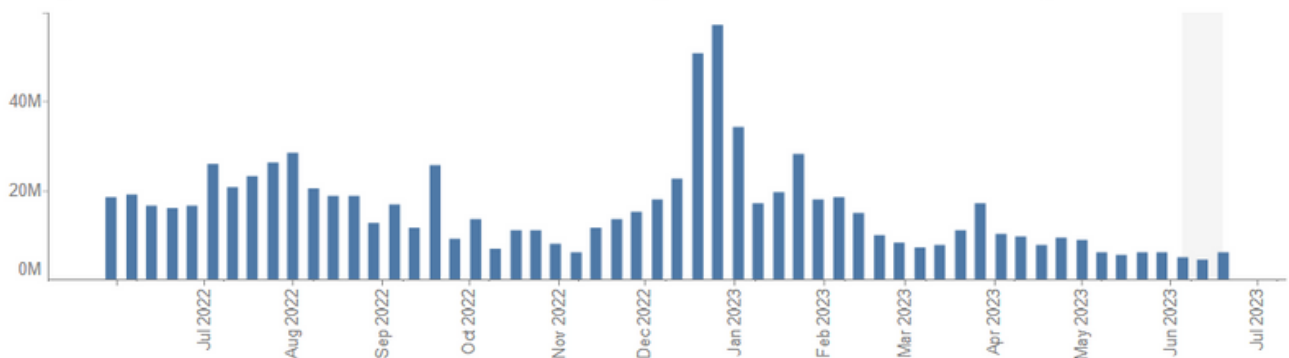
Watauga County COVID-19 Community Level:

LOW

STATE WASTEWATER SURVEILLANCE DATA

NCDHHS tracks the level of COVID-19 shed into wastewater. This metric provides a reliable population level picture of the amount of virus at the community level.

Latest Week: An average of **6.1 Million COVID-19 virus particles** per person were found in wastewater samples statewide, **an increase** from the week before. (The week before was 4.4 Million.)

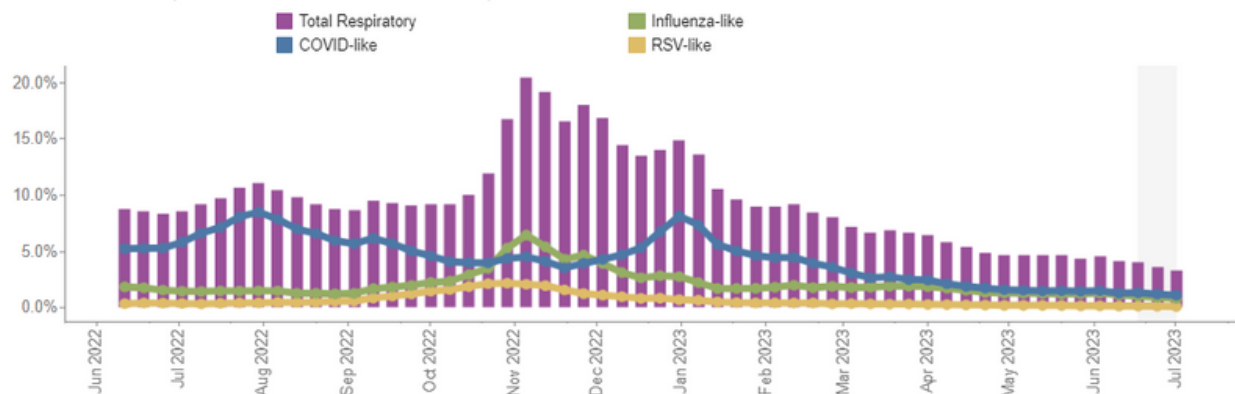


Average COVID-19 virus copies found per person per week from participating North Carolina wastewater treatment plants. COVID-19 virus particles appearing in wastewater can signal how quickly the virus is spreading, even if people don't get tested or have symptoms. Levels of influenza and RSV can also be measured in wastewater and may be included in the future. [More Info](#)

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS FOR RESPIRATORY VIRUS

This metric shows the percent of emergency department visits that are for symptoms or diagnoses of COVID-19, RSV, flu, and all acute respiratory illnesses combined. This metric provides an early indication of rising levels of respiratory illness in the community, and insight into the burden on local emergency departments.

Latest Week: **3.3% of emergency room visits** had symptoms of a respiratory virus, a **decrease** from the week before. (The week before was 3.6%.)



Percentage of North Carolina emergency department visits with symptoms or a diagnosis of a particular respiratory virus. [More info](#)

References and Data Notes

RSV Vaccine updates referenced:

CDC (2023). CDC Recommends RSV Vaccine For Older Adults, [Media Release]
<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/s0629-rsv.html>

Lyme disease prevention, symptomology, and outcome information referenced:
Lyme Disease (2022). <https://www.cdc.gov/lyme/>

Lyme disease data for North Carolina and prevention, symptomology, and outcome information referenced:

North Carolina Division of Public Health, Communicable Disease Branch (2023). Lyme Disease Surveillance Summary from 2017–2022.
<https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/lyme/LymeSurveillanceSummary2022.pdf>

Local data on Lyme Disease, General Communicable Diseases, Vaccine Preventable Diseases, and Sexually Transmitted Infections: North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System (2023).

North Carolina COVID-19 Data referenced:

NCDHHS (2023). North Carolina Respiratory Virus Summary Dashboard.
<https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/dashboard>

Data Notes

-Lyme disease cases for North Carolina and local counties include confirmed and probable cases.

-Communicable disease case data may be incomplete for recent months due to delays in testing and reporting of cases, and due to delays in symptom development or seeking testing and treatment.

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