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For Immediate Release

GREENWICH HEALTH DIRECTOR BLINDSIDED BY LYME DISEASE
Local Official Charged with Protecting Residents' Health Wins Battle Against Tick-Borne Illness

Greenwich, CT, October 2008 – Caroline Calderone Baisley, M.P.H., R.S., is accustomed to understanding illnesses, diseases and symptoms. As Director of the Department of Health for the Town of Greenwich, Conn., a position she's held for over a decade, protecting the town's nearly 63,000 residents from disease, premature death, illness and disability is all part of the job. But when strange symptoms began afflicting her 10 years ago, neither Ms. Baisley nor any of her doctors could pinpoint the problem.

"I'm in the habit of keeping a daily journal," she says, in which she noticed all of the unusual symptoms she began to face starting in 1998. These symptoms included "migraine headaches, stiff neck, flu-high fever and chills," followed by hives and then "my whole face began to swell and at times I couldn't open my eyes," she says. Soon, she was experiencing fatigue, muscle aches, lack of energy and depression, and then she started to have problems with her eyesight and hearing.

A year or two later, she says, she was becoming disoriented and could no longer follow directions while driving. She experienced panic attacks and memory problems so severe that she couldn't remember important phone numbers. During this time, she says, she visited numerous specialists including a dermatologist, allergist, ophthalmologist, infectious disease doctors, cardiologist, rheumatologist and a psychiatrist.

Finally, in 2003, when some of her fingers become claw-like and stiff she became convinced, despite never having had its characteristic bulls eye rash, that she had Lyme disease. At this time, Ms. Baisley says she asked for another test for Lyme disease. All previous Lyme tests had been negative. The new tests results were positive and she was referred to Dr. Amiram Katz, a Board Certified Neurologist and Lyme disease specialist. After an extensive evaluation Dr. Katz prescribed a course of intravenous antibiotics which Ms. Baisley ended up staying on for a long extended period of time. Today she is almost completely back to herself.

"As a public health official," Ms. Baisley says, "I was surprised that I did not recognize the symptoms of the disease at first. And I was equally surprised that most doctors that I saw did not digest fully all of the symptoms that were evident. For the most part the clinical test results were relied upon exclusively and they turned out to be false in the beginning. After she began to feel better she was shocked of the magnitude of Lyme disease and how much damage it could do.

"The problem with this disease is that the symptoms don't all happen at once", comments Ms. Baisley. "I realize that if I didn't get help when I did, I could have been permanently neurologically impaired," adds Ms. Baisley. While Ms. Baisley is almost 100% back to her old self, persistent joint pain and headaches reminds her that she continues to live with Lyme.

Symptoms of Lyme Disease

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 19,931 cases of Lyme disease were reported nationwide in 2006, yielding a national average of 8.2 cases per 100,000. While the disease affects people in nearly every state, the five states with the most reported cases are Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Lyme disease is caused by a bacterium carried in certain ticks. Most, but not all, people infected with Lyme will see a bullseye rash at the site of the tick bite between three and 30 days after infection. While this rash is a definitive symptom of Lyme, most diagnostic tests for the disease are unreliable and may produce false negatives, according to Time for Lyme, Inc. (www.timeforlyme.org), a research, education and advocacy network and affiliate of the Lyme Disease Association, which together have endowed the Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases Research Center at Columbia University Medical Center in New York City, the first of its kind dedicated to the study of chronic Lyme disease.

According to the CDC, the Lyme disease bacterium can infect several parts of the body, producing different symptoms at different times. Not all patients with Lyme disease will have all symptoms, and many of the symptoms can occur with other diseases as well.

Typical symptoms include fatigue, chills, fever, headache, muscle and joint aches and swollen lymph nodes. Left untreated, the infection may spread to other parts of the body such as the brain and cause symptoms including loss of muscle tone on one or both sides of the face, severe headaches and neck stiffness, shooting pains that may interfere with sleep, heart palpitations and dizziness due to changes in heartbeat, and pain that moves from joint to joint. Many of these symptoms will resolve, even without treatment.

After several months, more than half of patients with untreated Lyme infection will experience intermittent bouts of arthritis, with severe joint pain and swelling. Large joints are most often affected, particularly the knees. In addition, some untreated patients may develop chronic neurological complaints – including shooting pains, numbness or tingling in the hands or feet, and problems with concentration and short-term memory -- months to years after infection.

Debbie Siciliano, president and co-founder of Time for Lyme, says that Lyme disease is one of the fastest-growing diseases in the United States, and that CDC estimates suggest that actual Lyme diagnoses represent just 10 percent of actual cases, meaning that thousands more Americans may be infected and not know it.

“Anyone who thinks they may have been exposed to Lyme disease should ask their doctor for a two-tier blood test and remember that even with this testing, results vary according to the processing lab. The single most reliable tool is known exposure coupled with clinical symptoms. Siciliano warns that the blood tests widely used today to diagnose Lyme -- ELISA and Western Blot -- are not always reliable to make a definitive diagnosis of Lyme disease. If symptoms persist Siciliano counsels to seek out a Lyme literate doctor for further diagnosis and treatment.

In telling her story, Caroline Baisley hopes to educate the public about Lyme and other tick-borne diseases and to stress the importance of knowing the devastating affects this disease can have on your health. She hopes that residents and others will identify Lyme symptoms as early as possible so that they can seek treatment and get well. The Greenwich Department of Health along with support from Time for Lyme will be making a resource guide available entitled "Combating Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases". The guide will be mailed to all households in Greenwich in early Fall of 2008.

About Time for Lyme

Time For Lyme is an organization dedicated to eliminating the devastating effects of Lyme disease and other tick-borne illness. Our mission is to prevent the spread of disease, develop definitive diagnostic tools and effective treatments, and to ultimately find a cure for tick-borne illness by supporting research, education, and the acquisition and dissemination of information. In addition, we will continue to act as advocates for Lyme disease sufferers and their families through support of legislative reform on the federal, state and local levels. For more information on our organization, please visit www.timeforlyme.org.