Lyme Disease Fatality File

Lyme disease plagues the Northeastern U.S. In rare cases, it can be fatal.

Deaths are rare, but if Lyme bacteria enter the heart, the consequences can be serious.

Pete Smith felt pain in his back, neck, ankle, and jaw. Newly relocated to Maine for his job, the Quakertown native started to have trouble keeping food down. Then came a skin rash and night sweats, prompting him to go to the emergency room on June 5, 2017.

The Maine hospital ran a test for Lyme disease, which came back negative, said his mother, Angela. Yet less than a month later, the athletic 25-year-old died of that very disease.

Lyme disease is well-established in public awareness, especially in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and other northeastern states that are perennial hotbeds of the debilitating condition, caused by bacteria transmitted in a tick bite.

But death? The Smith family had no idea that was a possible consequence, and suspects most people are similarly unaware.