

Tulane University researcher selected to serve on federal Tick-Borne Disease Working Group

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ltate1@tulane.edu

985.871.6302



Dr. Monica Embers, associate professor of microbiology and immunology and director of vector-borne disease research at the Tulane National Primate Research Center, has been selected to serve on the federal Tick-Borne Disease Working Group.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has selected Tulane University researcher Monica Embers, associate professor of microbiology and immunology, to serve as one of 14 members of the 2021 Tick-Borne Disease Working Group.

The Working Group, established by Congress in 2016 as part of the 21st Century Cures Act, serves as a federal advisory committee that provides expertise and recommendations regarding all tick-borne diseases. The group, comprised of seven federally-appointed members and seven non-federal members, also evaluates tick-borne disease research priorities and helps ensure coordination between federal agencies. Members of the Working Group serve 18-month terms.

The primary function of the Working Group is the development of a report of findings and recommendations regarding the federal response to tick-borne disease prevention, treatment, and research, which it submits to Congress and the Secretary of Health and Human Services every two years.

Embers, who previously served on subcommittees of the Working Group that focused on Lyme disease pathogenesis, vaccines, and therapeutics, said she is honored by the invitation.

“It is very exciting to have the opportunity to shape future funding priorities regarding tick-borne disease research and response,” said Embers. “I’d like to see more of an emphasis on the neurological impacts of Lyme disease and a renewed commitment to improving how we diagnose and treat the disease.”

Embers’ research focuses on the effectiveness of antibiotics and other therapeutics to eradicate *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the bacterium which causes Lyme disease, from the body and has a particular interest in persistent Lyme disease. Embers also serves as the director of vector-borne disease research at the Tulane National Primate Research Center.

There are nearly 20 tick-borne diseases in the United States that pose risk to human health, and Lyme disease is the most common. Approximately 500,000 people are diagnosed with Lyme disease each year, a number that has steadily increased over the past 25 years.