

Advice Sheet - Insect Bite Precautions

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Categories: Health and Medical

Insect Precautions

Immunizations and medications may protect travelers from some diseases transmitted by insects - such as yellow fever or malaria - but there are many other insect-borne diseases for which no pharmaceutical prevention exists. Avoiding these diseases requires the careful use of insect bite precautions. Travelers visiting rural areas to work or engaging in camping, hiking, or adventure travel are generally at the greatest risk of exposure to mosquitoes, ticks, mites, fleas, and other disease carrying insects. However, even urban visitors need to take precautions to avoid insect exposure in some locations.

General Protective Measures

Know the disease risks in the areas where you will be traveling, including the insects that transmit diseases and the times when these insects are most active. For example:

- Dengue fever, chikungunya, and Zika virus are transmitted by mosquitoes that are active during the day and usually present in urban areas.
- Sand flies transmit leishmaniasis and are commonly active in forested areas from dusk to dawn.
- Mosquitoes that transmit malaria are active from dusk to dawn.
- Ticks may be present at any time in forested or tall grass areas.

Tick-Specific Precautions

After being in wooded areas, bathe or shower as soon as possible, and conduct a full-body tick check using a hand-held or full-length mirror to view all parts of the body. Examine gear and pets to prevent bringing ticks into the home. Tumble clothes in a dryer on high heat for one hour to kill remaining ticks.

To safely remove a tick:

- Use fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick as close as possible to the skin.
- Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Do not twist or jerk.
- Clean the bite area with rubbing alcohol, iodine, or soap and water.

- Dispose of live ticks by submersing in alcohol, placing in a sealed bag or container, or flushing down the toilet. Do not crush ticks with your fingers.

Mosquito- and Biting Fly-Specific Precautions

Cover as much skin as possible; wear long sleeves, long trousers, socks, shoes/boots, and a hat. Avoid sandals, and tuck shirts into pants and pant legs into socks.

Sleep in protected areas with screens or air conditioning, or use a permethrin-impregnated sleeping bed net. Ensure there are no tears in the netting, and that it is tucked in securely around the bed area. Check and eliminate any mosquitoes from inside rooms and sleeping areas before retiring. This is especially important in areas with malaria.

Insecticide sprays may be used to clear rooms of mosquitoes. Coils should only be used outdoors; avoid using coils that contain DDT. Be aware that many foreign-produced repellents and insecticides are extremely toxic.

Use an insect repellent that contains DEET (around 35 percent) on exposed areas of skin and clothing. Avoid eyes and inhalation of the spray. DEET formulations of as high as 50 percent are recommended for both adults and children older than two months of age. Repellent products that do not contain DEET are unlikely to offer the same degree of protection from mosquito bites as products containing DEET. Other types of repellents have not necessarily been as thoroughly studied as DEET and may not be safer for use on children. The recommendations for DEET use in pregnant women do not differ from those for nonpregnant adults. In general, the lower the concentration of DEET, the more often it needs reapplication. Products containing 35-percent DEET require application every four to five hours. Products containing 20-percent DEET concentration should be applied every two to three hours, and 10-percent DEET should be applied every one to two hours. All insect repellents should be applied **after** sunscreen and reapplied after swimming or bathing.

Repellents containing permethrin can be sprayed on clothing, bed nets, and camping gear. This is an effective repellent for mosquitoes, ticks, and other insects. Permethrin remains effective even with repeated washings.

Access a full discussion of repellents at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2020/noninfectious-health-risks/mosquitoes-ticks-and-other-arthropods>

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