



Bugged Out? Learn How to Protect Yourself From Mosquitoes

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FOX NEWS

With the unofficial start of summer here — people all over the country are heading outdoors to go camping, hit the beach, and barbecue — but chances are, the majority of these people will likely run into some unwanted guests. No, not your in-laws — we're talking about mosquitoes. ADVERTISEMENT

Not only are they annoying, these little pests can leave you riddled with painful insect bites and even more scary, they can carry the potentially deadly West Nile virus.

But before we get to that, let's take a look at some ways you can keep these bloodsuckers from "eating you alive."

Bug Repellents

From bug sprays to citronella candles, you can find a plethora of remedies to keep bugs at bay in your local drug store. However, not all of them are created equal.

"There is only one product you can use to prevent mosquito bites and that's insect repellent," Dr. Clifford Bassett, medical director of Allergy and Asthma Care of New York, told FoxNews.com. "It's largely been DEET-containing repellents that have been proven to be effective in protecting us from mosquito bites and other insect bites."

Bassett said DEET works by throwing off the insect's receptors and disorienting it so that it cannot bite the skin.

If you have concerns about using DEET, especially when it comes to children, Bassett recommends following guidelines put forth by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

"The AAP says if you use DEET on your children, don't use a product containing more than 10 percent, always apply it to yourself first, and never apply it to your child's hands," he said.

The AAP also states not to use DEET on children younger than 2 months and for older kids, the agency says parents should only apply repellents containing DEET once a day.

As for adults, it depends on how much time you plan spending in the great outdoors.

"The percentage of DEET you should look for in a product depends on your exposure and how long you will be outside," Bassett said. "A higher concentration is going to last longer, so you have to read the label which will give you an idea in terms of when to apply it and how long it is going to last."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offered these guidelines based on a study from 2002:

- A product containing 23.8 percent DEET provided an average of 5 hours of protection from mosquito bites.
- A product containing 20 percent DEET provided almost 4 hours of protection
- A product with 6.65 percent DEET provided almost 2 hours of protection
- Products with 4.75 percent DEET were both able to provide roughly 1 and a half hours of protection.

If you're looking for more natural options, Bassett said there are plenty of products.

“There are natural alternatives that contain geranium oil or soy bean oil, and they act as a repellent,” he said. “But you have to check and figure out what your risk is going to be. How long will you be outside? Are you going to be at a backyard barbecue or are you going camping in the woods? Some of the natural products are OK, but you need to read the label to determine if they will be sufficient for your needs. Usually they don’t last as long, where as DEET can last up to seven hours.”

Despite the effectiveness of insect repellents, nothing is 100 percent, which means you will inevitably get bitten. And for some, the results can be pretty painful.

“For the majority of people who have allergies to mosquito bites, the reaction is minimal,” Bassett said. “But if you do have symptoms of a severe allergic reaction, which include hives, itchiness in areas other than where you got bit, tightness in the chest, swelling of the tongue and throat, and dizziness, you should seek immediate medical attention.”

Bassett also stressed not to scratch the bites because you could run the risk of getting an infection.

“You can treat a bite with warm soapy water, over-the-counter cortisone steroid creams, ice and cool compresses,” he said.

By the way, the prime biting times are usually dawn and dusk, and mosquitoes love women because they have more estrogen in the skin.

“It seems like women in some instances are more likely to be bitten than men because of scented products they wear like perfumes, skin creams and deodorants, but also because of the estrogen in their skin,” he added.

[Click here for more from the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology.](#)

More from the CDC the Environmental Protection Agency:

[CDC and repellents](#)

[Information on repellent active ingredients from the EPA](#)

West Nile Virus

The mosquito-borne disease first appeared in the United States in the summer of 1999, and has since spread like wildfire to all 48 contiguous states. Over those years, thousands of people have been infected resulting in more than 1,000 deaths.

The most [recent figures](#) from the CDC from 2009 show 32 people died from the virus, which was down from 44 deaths in 2008.

Dr. Andrew Gotlin, medical director of Ryan/Chelsea-Clinton Community Health Center in Manhattan, told FoxNews.com he sees very few confirmed cases.

“The reason is, even if you’re bitten by a mosquito that is infected with West Nile, only 1 in 5 people actually get sick,” he said. “And of those people who do get sick, the majority have a very mild illness resembling a mild flu or mild viral illness and they may not even seek medical attention. But for the small percentage of people who do get really sick, it’s about 1 in 150 people.”

Symptoms are usually mild, Gotlin said, with 50 percent of people presenting with an obvious rash located on the trunk of their body. Other signs include headache, body aches, muscle aches and fever.

“If it’s a severe case, the person will have a bad headache, high fever, disorientation and even seizures,” Gotlin said. If it enters the brain however, it can be deadly.

“It may cause encephalitis, which is swelling of the brain itself, or you may get meningitis, which is swelling of the tissue surrounding the brain and spinal cord. These people are the people you really do have to worry more about and are usually hospitalized.”

There is no specific treatment if you do contract the virus, Gotlin said, it's all about supportive care.

"You sort-of have to ride it out until the virus clears and person recovers," he said.

With that said, prevention is the key.

"Because mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk, be extra aware at those times of day and use insect repellent containing DEET," Gotlin added.

Here are some other tips:

- Wear long pants and long sleeves to minimize exposure of the skin;
- Spray your clothing with insect repellent to prevent mosquitoes from landing on your clothes;
- Remove mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets barrels, bird baths and anything else that may hold water;
- Make sure all windows and doors have screens;
- If you have any symptoms, immediately visit your doctor so you can be tested.

"Remember in most cases, infection is mild and not life-threatening," Gotlin said. "So if you're going to spend time outside, enjoy it. Just make sure you take the proper precautions."

[Click here for more on methods of mosquito control from the EPA.](#)

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