

Mosquito Bites: Prevention and Treatment



Now that mosquitoes are spreading the West Nile virus, repellents are about more than avoiding ruined camp-outs and itchy bites. Where malaria and mosquito-borne dengue fever are endemic, repelling mosquitoes can save lives. One case of West Nile virus has already been reported in Kern County this summer.

DEET is hard to beat. It was first patented by the U.S. Army and has been in commercial use since the 1950s. Apply it a half hour before or after applying sunscreen so the sunscreen doesn't increase your absorption of DEET.

Worries about its safety have tapered off, possibly because people are more concerned that a bite could make them sick. Many repellents have bright stickers that highlight the DEET content.

When you apply the repellent, it creates a cloud of molecules within a fraction of an inch over the skin. It doesn't actually repel a mosquito, DEET confuses it. The mosquito loses its appetite when those molecules clog receptors on its antennae.

Research reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* shows that all DEET products

delayed the first bite for much longer than other repellents. A product with a relatively small amount (6.65 percent) lasted an average of 112.4 minutes. OFF! Deep Woods (23.8 percent) lasted 301 minutes; Sawyer Controlled Release (20 percent) lasted 234 minutes. Citronella products lasted 10 to 20 minutes.

The American Academy of Pediatrics warns against using repellents that are more than 10 percent for children. Adults can use DEET in concentrations of up to 35 percent.

Studies in New York suggest that about 80 percent of those actually infected with the West Nile virus remained symptom free. Of the 20 percent who developed symptoms, only one percent developed encephalitis and meningitis that can lead to disability or death.

You can dramatically decrease your chances of contracting West Nile by taking precautions to minimize exposure to infected mosquitoes, especially from July through the fall when mosquitoes are most abundant.

- Reduce mosquitoes. They breed in stagnant water such as birdbaths, fountains and fish ponds.
- Reduce the amount of time you spend outdoors at dawn and dusk, the times when mosquitoes are most likely to feed.
- Wear shoes, socks, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt when outdoors.

Easy Treatments for Mosquito Bites

No drugstore remedies on hand? Try these by *Rodale's Home Remedies of Pennsylvania*:

- **Onion Juice:** Breaks down chemicals that cause pain response.
- **Liquid Soap:** Can neutralize toxins in the bite. Dab it on and leave it.
- **Alcohol:** This solvent helps to remove toxins from the bite and inhibits proteins that cause irritation.
- **Aspirin:** Controls inflammation. Rub it on the bite (unless you are allergic to it).
- **Vicks VapoRub:** Rub a little on and around the bite. It contains menthol, which deadens nerve endings.



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