



Insect Precautions Fact Sheet

- Many diseases are spread by infected insects such as mosquitoes or flies—or ticks, which are *arachnids* and related to spiders - and their bites can cause itching or discomfort.
- Before you travel outside of the country, or participate in outdoor activities during the warm months in Canada, be aware of the infected insects / bugs that might be present and know their peak biting times (e.g. day vs. night) and areas (e.g. indoors vs. outdoors, rural vs. urban).
- To minimize your risk, you should always take personal protective measures to avoid insect bites and ensure you have the appropriate preventive vaccines and / or medications.

Personal Protective Measures Against Insect Bites:

Cover up:

- Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved, loose fitting, tucked-in shirts, long pants, shoes or boots (not sandals), and a hat. Mosquitoes are attracted to dark colours.

Use insect repellent on exposed skin:

- Insect repellents help to prevent blood-feeding insects from landing and biting.
- Repellents do **not** work against stinging insects such as bees, hornets, wasps or ants.
- Insect repellents that contain DEET or Icaridin / Picaridin are the most effective; use as directed by the manufacturer and only apply on exposed skin, not under clothing.
- Icaridin is preferred for children 6 months to 12 years of age. Make sure products are approved for use before using on children and avoid putting repellent on their hands.
- Do not spray directly on the face or apply to cuts, abrasions or irritated skin and don't breathe in aerosol or spray.
- Wash your hands after application and avoid contact with lips and eyes.
- Do not use products that contain both insect repellent and sunscreen.
- If you need to apply both sunscreen and repellent, apply the sunscreen first and let it soak into the skin for about 15 minutes, then apply the repellent.
- When travelling to areas with a high risk of diseases spread by insects, reapply repellent as directed.
- If you want to minimize the amount of repellent used, apply at times of the day when insects are most active and exposure is more likely.
- Shower or wash repellent-treated skin when danger of being bitten is removed.

Consider your accommodations:

- Stay in a well-screened or completely enclosed air-conditioned room.
- Avoid staying in poorly constructed housing such as mud, adobe or thatch structures.

Sleep under a bed net, preferably treated with insecticide, e.g. permethrin:

- Make sure the net is intact (no tears) and tuck it under the mattress.
- Make sure it is not touching you (you could be bitten through the net).
- Use for playpens, cribs, or strollers to protect young children.

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Apply a permethrin insecticide to clothing and other travel gear for greater protection

- Although permethrin is not available in Canada, travel health clinics can advise you how to purchase it and treat gear either before or during your trip, as directed.
- Permethrin-treated clothing may give effective protection for 2 weeks or six washings.
- Do not use permethrin directly on skin.
- DEET may be used, but be aware that it can damage plastic / synthetic materials.

Mosquitoes

- Mosquitoes are the insects most commonly associated with spreading disease.
- Night-time, or “dusk to dawn” biters, spread Malaria and Japanese Encephalitis.
- Daytime, or “sunrise to sunset” biters, spread Zika, Dengue Fever, Chikungunya, West Nile Virus and Yellow Fever (see Fact Sheets).
- Daytime biters also bite in artificial light so you need to use protection after dark in well-lit areas or indoors if the mosquitoes have managed to get inside.
- Currently, in Canada, West Nile Virus is the only viral infection spread by mosquitoes.
- It is more common in August and September.

Ticks

- Not all ticks are infected, but the infected ones can cause diseases such as Lyme disease, which is carried by the black-legged tick / deer tick.
- Protect yourself against tick bites in tick-infested areas by using bug spray with DEET and following the personal protective measures on page 1 and the Lyme Disease Fact Sheet.

Biting flies

- Biting flies can transmit diseases, for example, Leishmaniasis is caused by sand flies. It is a common parasitic disease of the tropics, subtropics and southern Europe.
- Bed netting with a mesh of 300 holes per square inch will keep out tiny sand flies.
- See the Leishmaniasis Fact Sheet.

Bed Bugs

- Bed Bugs are just a nuisance—they do not spread disease.
- There has been a recent increase in bedbug infestations, especially in developed countries.
- Travellers can take measures to avoid bedbug bites and avoid transporting them in luggage and clothing. See the Bed Bug Fact Sheet.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 or 1-800-267-2803, ext. 349. | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | hpePublicHealth.ca

References

- Canadian Pediatric Society. June 2014
- CDC Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. July 2015
- Government of Canada. Jan. 2016

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