

## Choosing and Using Insect Repellents

Protecting yourself from insect bites is important. Insect bites are itchy and uncomfortable. Plus, insect bites can spread diseases like West Nile or Zika viruses.

How to choose an insect repellent:

Choose an insect repellent based on the amount of time you need protection. How long a product works depends on the concentration of the active ingredient. Most insect repellents need to be reapplied every 2 to 3 hours. Check the manufacturer's label to find out how long the repellent will work when it's used correctly.

Best ingredients to look for:

DEET

Picaridin

Oil of lemon eucalyptus

IR3535

Products that contain permethrin also work well. You can use permethrin with other insect repellents for extra protection, but do not spray permethrin on the skin. Spray it on clothes and gear. Allow clothes to dry completely before wearing them.

Always read and closely follow the directions on the labels of insect repellents. Avoid products that have both sunscreen and insect repellent. Sunscreens should be applied more often and more liberally than insect repellents. If you need both, use separate products. Apply sunscreen before applying insect repellent.

Is DEET safe?

DEET is safe when directions on the label are followed. DEET can cause skin rashes, but rarely. Keep in mind that there's not much benefit using a product with over 50% DEET.

Which insect repellents can be used on children and during pregnancy?

Most insect repellents, including those with up to 30% DEET, can be used on kids two months and older. However, oil of lemon eucalyptus shouldn't be used on those younger than three years. Double-check the label to make sure an insect repellent is okay to use on a child. The insect repellents DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and oil of lemon eucalyptus are safe to use during pregnancy and while breastfeeding, when used as directed.

What about other methods, such as devices, eating garlic, etc?

There's no proof that special bracelets or clip-on devices, vitamins, or garlic will keep insects away.

Tips for safe use of insect repellents:

Don't use repellents under clothing, or on cuts, wounds, or irritated skin.

Don't apply repellents to eyes or mouth. Apply lightly around ears.

Don't spray repellents on the face. Spray on hands first, then apply to the face.

Don't allow kids to handle repellents. Apply repellent to your own hands, then put it on the child.

Avoid heavy application of repellents. If a thin film doesn't work, apply a bit more.

After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water.

Never put permethrin on skin. Apply permethrin only to clothing, bed nets, or other fabrics.

Don't apply insect repellent to cats or dogs. Talk to your vet about options for pets.

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