



Insect Bite Precautions

Many travel-related diseases are spread by infected insects such as mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, or flies. Before you travel, be aware of the insects at your destination that cause disease and know their peak biting times (day or night) and high-risk areas, such as indoors vs. outdoors or rural vs. urban.

To minimize your risk, you should always take protective measures to avoid insect bites and ensure you have the appropriate preventive vaccines and/or medications.

Protect yourself from insect bites:

Cover up: Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved, loose fitting, tucked-in shirts, long pants, shoes or boots (not sandals), and a hat. In tick infested areas, you can also tape the cuffs of your pants or tuck them inside your socks, shoes or boots.

Use insect repellent on exposed skin: In Canada, insect repellents that contain DEET or Icaridin are the most effective. When used as directed, insect repellents have an excellent safety record. Repellents that contain icaridin (20%) should be the first choice for children aged six months to 12 years. Repellents containing age-appropriate concentrations of DEET should be considered as a second choice for children aged six months to 12 years.

In general, as the concentration of DEET or icaridin increases, so too does the period of bite protection. Currently, the maximum concentrations permitted for adult use in Canada are: 30% DEET or 20% icaridin. Products with less than 10% active ingredient may offer only limited protection, often 1–2 hours.

Follow the instructions by the manufacturer. Do not spray the product directly on the face or to cuts, abrasions or irritated skin. 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 with DEET, 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 when required. If you are being bitten but the time span noted on the label has not ended, it is recommended that you reapply the repellent.



After returning indoors, bathe or wash treated skin with soap and water. This is particularly important when repellents are used repeatedly throughout the day or used on consecutive days. Wash treated clothing before wearing it again.

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 (plant stalks or foliage used for roofing) structures. Check for ticks when returning from outdoor activities, and showering within 2 hours of being in a tick-infested area reduces the risk of tickborne diseases.

Sleep under a bed net, preferably treated with insecticide: Insecticide-impregnated nets either repel or kill the insects after they land on the net. They are safe for pregnant women and children. Make sure the net is intact, with no tears. Tuck it under the mattress. Make sure it is not touching you, as you could be bitten through the net. Daytime use is recommended, especially for playpens, cribs, or strollers to protect young children. Nets treated with insecticide will be effective for several months if they are not washed.

Wear permethrin-treated clothing for greater protection: Adult clothing pretreated with the insecticide permethrin can now be purchased in Canada. Children's permethrin-treated clothing is not available since permethrin has not been proven to be safe for children. Permethrin-treated clothing is effective through several washes.