

# Tips to help you avoid bug bites this summer

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Summer means more bugs, including pesky mosquitoes and ticks. Our specialists have tips about which insects are harmful, what diseases they carry and how to safely avoid them.

"Mosquitoes and ticks are the two pests you primarily want to avoid because they can carry infectious diseases," said Jennifer Layden, MD, infectious disease specialist at Loyola University Health System. "Ticks can carry Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever and mosquitoes can spread West Nile virus."

To avoid these pests, you may buy insect repellent. But what levels of protection do they offer?

DEET is the most effective ingredient to protect against biting insects. "Common insect repellent products contain up to 30 percent DEET for maximum protection," said Christina Hantsch, MD, a toxicologist at Loyola. "Products with DEET provide longer duration protection as the concentration of DEET increases."

The longest duration is up to five hours for 30 percent DEET concentration. "Use a product appropriate for the duration of the outdoor activity," Hantsch said. "I recommend avoiding extended chemical product exposure by changing clothes and washing off insect repellent with soap and water when you come inside."

DEET and other insect repellants such as citronella are generally safe for individuals over 2 months of age. To use a specific product correctly,

follow the directions on the package. "Check labels to use a product that is approved by the Environmental Protection Agency as an added measure of safety," Layden said. "I usually recommend that the product be reapplied every few hours to maintain effectiveness."

Layden recommended that adults administer [insect repellent](#) to children. "Kids can have a difficult time manipulating cans and bottles. You want to avoid inhaling repellent or getting it in the mouth or eyes," she said.

Clothing that is pretreated with repellent is available and remains effective through many washings. "Permethrin-treated fabric is a great option for those who are very active outdoors in the warm months," Layden said. "Treated clothing is safe and approved."

Tips from Dr. Layden on how to avoid bugs this summer:

- Dusk and dawn are the prime hours for insects
- Wear long sleeves and long pants to cover skin
- Wear light colors, which don't attract bugs as much as darker colors
- Wear loose clothing to avoid skin irritation

"Calamine lotion is effective to take away the annoying itch of a mosquito bite," Hantsch said. For tick removal, use a tweezer as close to the entry of the skin as possible to remove the whole tick. "Clean the bite area with an antiseptic and cover with a loose bandage."

Signs that you need medical attention include fever, vomiting, excessive sleepiness, swelling, redness and infection.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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