

Getting the Most out of Your Insect Repellent

In my last article I focused on mosquito and black fly bites, their symptoms, how they may be treated and briefly on how they may be prevented. I would like to take time now to discuss personal insect repellents and their role in reducing bites from these insects. With numerous different products available it is important know how to choose one to suit your needs and how to apply it properly.

The most common ingredient found in insect repellents is DEET. Available in different concentrations, products containing DEET are effective at repelling mosquitoes, black flies, and ticks. It is important to know that the higher the concentration of DEET, the longer it will provide protection. For this reason, if you plan to be outdoors for short periods of time, a product containing a lower concentration of DEET should be used. It may then be re-applied if you require longer protection.

When selecting an insect repellent that contains DEET it is also important to take age into consideration. Depending on your age, more or less DEET can be applied throughout the day. In adults and children over the age of 12, up to a 30% concentration of DEET can be used and will provide approximately six hours of protection. This is in contrast to children aged 2 to 12, who should use up to a 10% concentration of DEET, applied up to three times daily. One application of 10% DEET will provide approximately 3 hours of protection. Children aged 6 months to 2 years may also use DEET at a concentration no higher than 10%, but should only apply it once daily. Personal insect repellents containing DEET should not be used in infants under 6 months of age. Insect netting when the child is outdoors should be used instead.

Often I get questions about a non-DEET containing insect repellent. A common alternative used is a citronella based product. Personal insect repellents containing citronella provide protection for approximately 2 hours and therefore should be applied more frequently.

Now that you have selected a product to meet your needs it is important to apply it properly. Insect repellents should be applied sparingly, only on skin that is exposed or on top of clothing. Applying a heavy coat will not provide any extra protection! Try to avoid getting insect repellent in your eyes, on open cuts, or on irritated skin. If you do, be sure to rinse the area immediately with water. You should also avoid spraying insect repellent directly onto your face; instead spray it on your hands and then apply to your face. Finally insect repellents should never be applied to the hands of children, as this may increase the chance of getting it in their mouth or eyes.

Often this time of year it is necessary to use both insect repellent and sunscreen. These two products may be used safely at the same time, but because it needs to penetrate your skin to be effective, sunscreen should be applied first, followed by the insect repellent.

It is important know that allergic reactions are possible when using insect repellents. If you think either you or your child is having a reaction, stop using the product immediately, wash the area, and seek medical attention. If you are concerned about having a reaction it may be wise to apply the repellent to a small area of skin and wait 24 hours to see if any reactions occur.

Personal insect repellents play a major role in reducing insect bites. With numerous different products available it is not only important to know how to choose one to suit your needs but also how to apply it properly. If you have any questions be sure to ask your pharmacist or family physician. Remember your health is our number one priority!

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