

Infection Prevention and You



How to Prevent Pesky Summer Pests

We love summer, but we hate the bugs that come with it. As the weather heats up, it is likely you will encounter these pesky creatures. If you've ever been bitten by a mosquito, tick, or flea, you probably have experienced the itching and irritation they cause. We may call them "pests," but these vectors can spread germs and diseases with their bites. The term "vector-borne diseases" refers to the illnesses these bugs spread from person-to-person and animal-to-person. Vectors include organisms like mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, flies, etc.

The following information can help you decrease your risk of getting bitten, and thus, avoid the potential for getting an infection.

The Mosquito

The primary culprit that comes to mind during the summer is the mosquito. Mosquito bites can cause illnesses including Zika, malaria, West Nile virus (WNV), chikungunya, and others. Most people bitten by the mosquito carrying Zika or WNV won't show symptoms, and the people who do show symptoms tend to show them mildly. There are no vaccines or medicine for Zika or WNV, but you can decrease your risk of infection by [preventing mosquito bites](#).

Although Malaria is usually found outside of the United States, cases are still identified from those who have traveled to other countries where malaria is common, such as Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. Symptoms of malaria include chills, fever, nausea and vomiting, and body aches. Malaria can be treated, but can become serious and life-threatening if the illness advances. Travelers should always take precautions when traveling to countries where malaria is a risk.

How to prevent mosquito bites:

Mosquitoes can bite both indoors and outdoors, mostly during the daytime; therefore, it is important to ensure protection from mosquitoes throughout the entire day.

- Use an [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)-registered insect repellent](#).
 - Follow product directions and reapply as directed.
 - If using sunscreen, apply sunscreen first and insect repellent second.
 - Using an insect repellent is safe for pregnant women and nursing mothers.
- Cover exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and hats.
- Regularly empty containers outside your home that trap standing water such as planters, bird baths, and toys.
- Contact your local health department to report high numbers of mosquitoes or standing water in your neighborhood.

The Tick

Tickborne diseases are on the rise. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), ticks account for nearly 60 percent of all vector-borne diseases in the U.S. Ticks are most active in the spring and summer months and live in areas where we live, work, and play. Ticks can be found in every state throughout the continental U.S. The types of tick-borne diseases vary based on where you are in the U.S. Two of the most well-known tick-borne diseases

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are Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF). Symptoms of these illnesses include fever, headache, fatigue, and skin rash. Contact your healthcare provider as soon as you notice a tick bite.

How to protect yourself against tick bites:

Prevention and early recognition of tick bites is key. The risk of exposure to ticks is greatest in the woods and in the space between lawns and the edge of the woods. Ticks can also hitchhike to your lawn and into your house via your pet. Decrease your risk of being bitten by a tick:

- Avoid tick-infested areas, especially during the months of May, June, and July
- When in a tick-infested area, walk in the center of trails and avoid contact with overgrown grass, brush, and leaf litter at trail edges.
- Always check for ticks after being outdoors, even after being in your own yard. Ticks can hide under the armpits, behind the knees, in the hair, and in the groin areas.
- Use EPA-approved insect repellent that contains a 20 percent concentration of DEET on clothes and on exposed skin.
- Bathe or shower soon after coming indoors to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on your body.
- Dogs are very susceptible to tick bites and can bring ticks into your home. Your veterinarian can provide you the best advice on how to protect your pets from tick bites.

The Flea

People and animals can get plague from a bite from an infected rodent flea (or by handling an animal infected with plague). Plague can also be transmitted from inhaling droplets from a cough of an infected person or animal (especially sick cats). In the U.S., plague is not a common illness, but infections do occur. Plague infections are most commonly seen in the western states of Arizona, California, Colorado, and New Mexico. Many more cases occur in foreign countries; primarily Africa and Asia.

How to prevent the spread of plague:

You can protect your family, yourself, and your pets by following these steps:

- Eliminate nesting places for rodents around your home, sheds, garages, woodpiles, etc.
- Do not pick up or touch dead animals. If you must, wear protective gloves and wash your hands.
- Avoid sleeping in the bed with pets.
- Use EPA-approved insect repellent that contains a 20 percent concentration of DEET on clothes and on exposed skin.
- Treat dogs and cats regularly for fleas.
- Keep pet food in rodent-proof containers.
- Take sick pets to the veterinarian promptly.

Additional resources

- The CDC—Illnesses from Mosquito, Tick, and Flea Bites Increasing in the US <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2018/p0501-vs-vector-borne.html>
- The CDC—Prevent Mosquito Bites <https://www.cdc.gov/features/stopmosquitoes/index.html>
- The CDC—Lyme Disease <https://www.cdc.gov/lyme/index.html>
- EPA—Find the Insect Repellent that is Right for You <https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/find-repellent-right-you>
- APIC—What you need to know about Zika virus <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=what-you-need-to-know-about-zika-virus>
- APIC—What is Lyme disease? <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=what-is-lyme-disease>

Updated: 6/20/2018