



Insect and Tick Bite Avoidance

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Introduction

Many serious illnesses, including [dengue fever](#), [malaria](#) and [yellow fever](#) are spread by insect bites.

Day-biting (dawn to dusk) mosquitoes can carry [dengue fever](#) and [yellow fever](#); night-biting mosquitoes may carry [Japanese encephalitis](#) and [malaria](#). Mosquitoes are attracted by carbon dioxide, heat, smell and movement.

Sand flies, which carry diseases such as [leishmaniasis](#), are most active between dusk and dawn. They also bite in the day if disturbed.

Ticks can carry [Lyme disease](#), [tick-borne encephalitis](#), and the bacteria of African tick-bite fever. Ticks usually live in meadows and grasslands near woods and forests. They attach themselves during the day to your clothes. They then crawl until they find exposed skin and start feeding.

Tsetse flies spread [sleeping sickness \(African trypanosomiasis\)](#) and live in the dense vegetation and grasslands of sub-Saharan Africa. They are attracted to dark, contrasting colours, particularly blue, and bite during the day. They can attack in swarms and their bite is painful.

Bugs, including bedbugs, fleas, lice and mites can also spread disease. For example; fleas can spread plague, some mites carry typhus (a flu-like illness with a rash) and the kissing bug in South America carries a parasite that causes Chagas disease.

For many insect-borne diseases, avoiding bites is the only way to prevent them.



How do I avoid bites?

It may be impossible to completely avoid bites. However, the less you are bitten, the less likely that you will be exposed to insect-borne diseases.

Avoidance measures

Try to avoid places infested with insects, such as woods, jungles and swampy areas. Since many insects bite between dusk and dawn, staying indoors during this time will help reduce the number of bites. Since this is not always practical, it is important to follow bite avoidance advice.

Air conditioning and screening

Try to stay in air-conditioned accommodation as this usually reduces the number of insects in your room. Mesh screening on doors and windows also helps prevent insect visitors, but is not usually as effective as good air conditioning.

Clothes

- Wear loose fitting clothes (insects can get to your skin through tight clothing), long trousers and long sleeves. Don't go barefoot.
- Malaria mosquitoes are most active after dark, so it's important to be vigilant about covering up in the evenings in malarial regions.
- In tick-infested areas, avoid shorts/skirts and tuck your trousers into your socks. This stops ticks crawling up your legs.
- Clothes can be sprayed with permethrin, an insecticide which kill insects on contact. It should not be used directly onto skin.

Repellents

DEET-containing (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) repellents work the best. They are available in several strengths; it is not necessary to use concentrations of greater than 50%. You can get them in creams, lotions and sprays.

According to extensive research and experience, DEET is very safe when you follow the manufacturer's instructions. Up to 50% DEET can be used by pregnant or breast-feeding women and for babies/children older than 2 months. DEET is not usually recommended for babies under 2 months. If you are taking a very young baby to a malaria and/or yellow fever risk country, you should get expert advice about suitable repellents.

Alternative repellents, such as Icaridin (Autan®) and lemon eucalyptus oil (Mosi-guard®) are also available. Repellents based on lemon eucalyptus oil generally do not last as long as DEET repellents, so need applying frequently. 20% strength Icaridin repellents are recommended and can be used for children aged two years and older.

Using repellents:

- Apply to exposed skin.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.
- Avoid spraying directly onto your face - use a cream/lotion or spray repellent on your hands and then rub on your face.
- Avoid getting repellent in your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Re-apply regularly, especially after swimming, and in hot, humid countries, as sweating reduces effectiveness.
- Don't swallow repellent.
- Don't put apply to cuts, grazes or broken/irritated skin.
- Wash hands afterwards.
- If you are using sunscreen, put it on before your repellent.
- Sunscreen containing repellent should generally not be used.

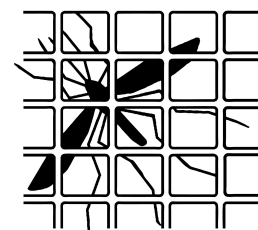
Sprays, mosquito coils and plug in devices.

- Plug-in devices which release an insecticide mist are available. You usually need an adapter plug overseas.
- Insecticide coils are circles of solid insecticide that can be burnt outside.
- Fly sprays or "knock down sprays" are generally not effective.



Mosquito nets

- If your accommodation doesn't have screens or effective air conditioning, you should sleep under an intact mosquito net.
- Most nets available in the UK have been treated with an insecticide, such as permethrin. This kills insects on contact.
- Permethrin solution can be bought to soak nets that haven't been pre-treated. These nets will need to be soaked again after six months use.
- Babies and children need nets as well. Cot nets are available.
- Carry a sewing kit for repairs in case your net develops a hole. In an emergency, cotton wool can be used to plug net holes.



Where can I get a net?

Most specialist camping shops, travel clinics and large chemists stock a wide range of insect repellents, insecticides and treated mosquito nets.

What doesn't work?

There is no proof (scientific or otherwise) that bath oils, electronic “buzzers”, essential oils, homeopathic remedies, smoking, vitamin tablets, yeast extract (Marmite®) or eating garlic prevents insect bites.

Treating Bites

Insect bites are usually small, red, raised itchy bumps.

- Keep bites clean and don't cover them with dressing or plasters.
- Try not to scratch, as this can introduce infection.
- Swelling can be reduced by applying anti-histamine cream.
- Anti-histamine tablets can help relieve itching. These can be bought over the counter from UK chemists.
- If bites appear infected, see a doctor, as you could need antibiotics.
- If you've had a severe allergic reaction to insect bites in the past, get advice from you doctor **before** you travel. You may need to carry special medication.

Removing Ticks

Ticks need to be removed from the skin carefully. They should be removed with tweezers or special tick removers. Grasp the tick near to the skin and steadily pull it out. Be careful not to crush the tick's body or squeeze its stomach contents into the bite site.

Links

NHS Choices:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Bites-insect/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

