

Mosquito Protection

With concerns growing about the spread of the Zika virus in the United States, we have noticed more patients inquiring about how to safely repel mosquitoes and their disease-inducing bites.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is urging everyone to take steps to prevent mosquito bites with such things as appropriate clothing and Environmental Protection Agency-registered insect repellents. The repellents, according to the CDC, should have 1 of the following active ingredients: DEET; picaridin; or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Experts agree that, since it was developed in 1957, DEET has demonstrated that it is the best insect repellent to have been invented. Concentrations of 20% to 50% are effective and safe. Products that include 30% DEET, 20% Picardin or 65% Lemon Eucalyptus provide protection for about 8 hours and are as effective as products with higher chemical concentrations. (Although safe when used at these concentrations and interval, DEET can have adverse effects and should not be used in extreme quantities. If families are uncomfortable with DEET, the lemon-eucalyptus products are recommended.) Biting insects, including mosquitoes, are most attracted to where carbon dioxide is being emitted, so your face and ears are prime targets for a bite. Insects also tend to gravitate to areas of heavy sweat. Insecticide should be applied to any areas of exposed skin - making sure to not forget the ankles, feet, and scalp. Insecticides should not be applied to mouth, eyes, or cut or irritated skin and cautiously on infants' hands. Insect repellants should not be used on children under 4 months of age. Products with lemon eucalyptus oil or para-menthane-diol should not be used on children under 3 years of age.

Although insect repellants are very important for protection, the use of barrier clothing and window screens or mosquito nets in the home (particularly around the bed area) are essential. Parents should ensure that children's clothing covers their arms and legs. Cribs, strollers, and baby carriers should be covered with mosquito netting. Clothing and gear can also be treated with permethrin which last for 6 washes. Using these products, which impregnate clothing with insect repellent, could lead to less need for DEET and other insecticides. During the night, families should sleep in beds that have netting around them. One particularly effective tool is to spray clothing and mosquito netting with DEET-containing repellent.