

It's that time of the year again... don't forget the **INSECT REPELLANT!**

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by Dr. Matthew Hajduk

The cold, dreary days of winter have finally given away to the bright, warm days of spring. With the change in season comes the return of the annoying biting insects. As summer approaches, mosquitoes, ticks and biting flies will become more prevalent and they can cause more problems than an itchy big bite. As has been well documented, mosquitoes in New Hampshire have carried EEE (Eastern Equine Encephalitis Virus) and West Nile virus and ticks in the area carry the bacteria responsible for Lyme disease, *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The most effective way to prevent these mosquito-borne and tick-borne illnesses is to prevent the bites in the first place. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends three different types of insect repellants to prevent these bites.

The best studied insect repellants available are those that contain DEET. DEET is a chemical developed in the 1940's and has a long track record of safe use.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, products with less than 30% DEET are safe to use in infants. The percentage of DEET does not dictate how well the repellant works but how long the protection lasts. It's estimated that:

- 30% DEET protects for 6.5 hours
- 23.8% DEET protects for 5 hours
- 20% DEET protects for 4 hour
- 6.5% DEET protects for 2 hours
- 4.5% DEET protects for 1.5 hours

Parents should choose their product based on how long the family will be outdoors as it is recommended that whatever the percentage, DEET should only be applied once daily. Additionally, combination sunscreen and DEET products are available, but should not be used as sunscreen needs to be reapplied every 2 hours and DEET should be applied only once daily.

Insect repellants with picaridin as the active ingredient are relatively new in the United States, but has been used in Europe since 2001. Like DEET, the American Academy of Pediatrics considers picaridin to be safe for use in children >2 months of age. Picaridin has the advantages of a less oily feel

and, for most, a more pleasant odor. It also does not dissolve some plastics like DEET. Picaridin based repellants in concentrations of at least 7% are considered effective and should be reapplied every 3-4 hours.

Finally, the American Academy of Pediatrics does consider repellants containing Lemon Eucalyptus Oil be effective. This is a natural repellant. It should be reapplied every 2 hours, but should not be used in children under 3 years of age.

General safety precautions should be taken with all of these insect repellants. Be sure to read the repellant's instructions and follow all directions and precautions. Only apply these repellents on the outside of clothing and on exposed skin. Adults should apply the repellants for children and they should not be sprayed directly onto you or your child's face. Spray some on your hands and then apply it to you or your child's face, avoiding the eyes and mouth.

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