

by Lou Nackman, MD

Now that warm weather has returned, we all like to get outside to enjoy it. At Elliot pediatric offices, we get frequent questions from parents about tick bites, insect repellent and sunscreen. Here are a few tips to keep you and your family safe in the outdoors.

There are many myths about tick bites and how to remove ticks. Unfortunately, New Hampshire has one of the highest rates of Lyme disease in the country. Lyme disease is transmitted by tick bites but not every tick carries Lyme disease. In New Hampshire, Lyme disease is carried by the deer tick; however, it is believed that an infected tick must be attached to the human body for at least 36 to 48 hours in order to transmit Lyme disease. The best protection against Lyme disease is in preventing tick bites in the first place. The most effective insect repellent is DEET which also protects against mosquitoes as well.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Environmental Protection Agency recommend that it is safe to use products containing up to 30% DEET in children over 2 months of age. Here are some additional recommendations:

- DEET should only be applied to exposed skin, never over an open cut or over eczema
- A parent or caregiver should apply the repellent, never spray directly on the face – spray on hands first and then apply from the hands onto the face

- Do not apply to the eyes or the mouth
- Wash the repellent off young children's hands so they don't ingest it through hand to mouth activity
- Wash repellents off at the end of the day and check your child for ticks
- Combination insect repellents and sunscreen products are not recommended as sunscreen needs to be re-applied frequently and insect repellents should be used sparingly

If you or your child does get a tick bite, the best way to remove it is to use tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull it out. Do not try to suffocate the tick with Vaseline or gasoline/kerosene! Inevitably, small mouth parts (the "ticks head") will frequently remain in the skin. There is no need to try to dig them out as they will eventually come out all on their own over time.

Don't forget about protecting your pet as well, as they can bring ticks into your house. Talk to your veterinarian as they have very effective products available for your pet. 



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