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Home > Government > Departments and Divisions > Department of Public Health >

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Summer Time is Mosquito and Tick Season

Cover Up or Wear Bug Spray to Avoid Getting Bitten

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BOSTON — Memorial Day is almost here and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health wants people to stay safe and healthy as they enjoy the summer months. While colds and flu are more common during the winter, there are some infections that you are more likely to encounter in the summer.

Watch Out for Ticks

Lyme disease, spread to people and animals when they are bitten by an infected deer tick, is the most common tickborne disease in Massachusetts. In 2009, there were about 4,000 cases. The disease can cause serious complications if it is not recognized and treated early. Deer ticks can also carry germs that cause other diseases such as babesiosis and anaplasmosis. Although much less common, these diseases are very serious. To prevent getting diseases transmitted by ticks, you should:

- Use a repellent with DEET according to the directions on the product label
- Wear long-sleeved light colored shirts and long pants tucked into socks. This helps keep ticks off you and makes it easier to spot them.
- Consider applying a permethrin-containing repellent to your clothes according to the directions on the product label.
- Check yourself, your children and your pets for ticks once a day, if you have been anywhere there might be ticks. Favorite tick places are armpits, hairline, groin, legs, thighs, or in and behind the ears. Tick checks are an important way of preventing infection. Remove any attached tick you find as soon as possible with a fine point tweezers, grasping the tick as close to the skin as possible and pulling straight out with steady pressure. Getting the tick off within 24-36 hours of its attachment is very effective in preventing infection.
- Be aware of the early symptoms of Lyme disease such as a rash at the site of the tick bite and/or flu-like symptoms, and seek medical advice if you develop them.

Reduce Mosquito Bites

In Massachusetts, West Nile virus (WNV) and eastern equine encephalitis (EEE) virus are germs people may get if they are bitten by an infected mosquito. Most human cases of WNV and EEE occur in late summer and early fall. Not everyone infected with WNV will get sick but those over 50 are at greater risk for serious disease. EEE is a rare but very serious disease that can affect anyone. It's not too early to get into good mosquito-bite prevention habits that include:

- Use of repellents that contain **DEET**, **permethrin**, **IR3535** or **picaridin** (KBR 3023) provide protection against mosquitoes. In addition, **oil of lemon eucalyptus** has been found to provide as much protection as low concentrations of DEET.
- Taking special care to cover up the arms and legs of children playing outdoors. When you bring a baby outdoors, cover the baby's carriage or playpen with mosquito netting.
- Fixing any holes in your screens and make sure they are tightly attached to all your doors and windows.
- Removing any standing water around your home. Mosquitoes will begin to breed in any puddle or standing water that lasts for more than four days. Check gutters ceramic pots, trash cans, recycling containers, old tires, wading pools, bird baths, etc.

Avoid Contact with Wild and Unfamiliar Animals

Rabies is a fatal viral infection now most often found in raccoons, skunks, foxes, bats. It is spread to domestic animals or humans through contact with an infected animal's saliva, usually through a bite or scratch. Bats living inside houses are of particular concern. To avoid possible exposure to rabies:

- Enjoy wild and stray animals from a distance.
- Be sure your dog, cat or ferret has up-to-date rabies vaccinations.
- Feed pets inside and don't leave them outside unsupervised.
- If you find a bat in your home, do not release it. Contact your local health department for advice on what to do.
- If you are bitten or scratched by an animal that is not your own, vaccinated pet, wash the wound immediately and contact your health care provider or local health department.

More information on any of these topics is available on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's website at www.mass.gov/dph.

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