

Insect Repellents

Mosquitoes, biting flies, and ticks can be nuisances and sometimes pose a serious risk to public health. Insects can carry diseases such as West Nile Virus or Lyme disease. Choose your insect repellent wisely to protect your health.

There are a variety of products used for insect repellent, including: liquids, lotions, sprays, and items with built-in repellent, such as wrist bands. Different insect repellents are used for various applications and situations.

When using insect repellent, check the container to ensure the product has been approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Look for an EPA-approved label and registration number. Never use a product not approved by the EPA.

Store insect repellent out of children's reach, such as in a locked cabinet or garden shed.

Using Insect Repellents Safely

Before using an insect repellent, read and follow all the directions and precautions on the product's label.

- If you are also using sunscreen, apply sunscreen first and insect repellent second.
- Avoid using combination sunscreen/insect repellent products.
- Do not apply an insect repellent to broken or irritated skin.
- When using a repellent on a young child, do not apply it on the hands or near the eyes or mouth.
- Do not allow young children to apply their own insect repellent.
- Do not spray repellent in enclosed areas. Avoid breathing the spray or using it near food.
- Avoid spraying directly in the face or eyes.
- Use just enough repellent to cover your clothing and/or exposed skin.
- Avoid applying too much repellent.
- Wash your hands after the application.
- Do not use insect repellent under your clothing.
- After returning indoors, wash the treated skin with soap and water.
- Wash treated clothing before wearing it again.

Common Active Ingredients

Most repellents rely on some percentage of a chemical called DEET. DEET does not kill insects; its vapors discourage them from landing on you. DEET is available in many concentrations. Use an insect repellent with 30 to 50 percent DEET; you do not need 100 percent DEET. Note: DEET should not be used on infants under 2 months of age.

Another common active ingredient in insect repellents is picardin. Products with picardin concentrations between 7 and 15 percent are as effective as DEET-based products, but they require more frequent application.

There are more natural alternatives, if you choose. Products containing essential oils are also available. Some common examples include citronella, eucalyptus, and citrus essential oils.

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