

# Avoiding tick- and mosquito-borne illnesses

May 10 2018 11:28 AM

**SPRINGFIELD** – As the weather warms up, we're starting to see ticks and mosquitoes. The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reminding people about simple precautions they can take to avoid bites.



“Ticks can carry diseases like Lyme disease, spotted fever, and ehrlichiosis, while mosquitoes can carry West Nile virus,” said Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “These diseases can cause anywhere from mild to severe illness, and even death in some cases. To protect yourself from both, use insect repellent that contains DEET and follow some simple precautions.”

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, disease cases from mosquito, tick, and flea bites have tripled in the U.S. during the 13 years from 2004 through 2016. Reported cases from mosquito and tick bites in Illinois have increased by more than half (58%) from 2005 to 2016.

## Ticks

Many tick-borne diseases have similar symptoms. The most common symptoms can include fever, chills, aches and pains, and rash. Within two weeks following a tick bite, if you experience a rash that looks like a bull's-eye or a rash anywhere on your body, or

an unexplained illness accompanied by fever, contact your doctor. Early recognition and treatment of the infection decreases the risk of serious complications. Tell your health care provider the geographic area in which you were bitten or traveled to help identify the disease based on ticks in that region.

A fairly new virus called Bourbon virus has been associated with tick bites and has been found in a limited number of cases in the Midwest and southern U.S. People diagnosed with Bourbon virus disease have symptoms including fever, fatigue, rash, headache, other body aches, nausea, and vomiting. They also had low blood counts for cells that fight infection and help prevent bleeding. Some people who were infected later died.

Ticks are commonly found on the tips of grasses and shrubs. Ticks crawl?they cannot fly or jump. The tick will wait in the grass or shrub for a person or animal to walk by and then quickly climb aboard. Some ticks will attach quickly and others will wander, looking for places like the ear, or other areas where the skin is thinner.

Simple tips to avoid ticks bites include:

- Wear light-colored, protective clothing—long-sleeved shirts, pants, boots or sturdy shoes, and a head covering. Treat clothing with products containing 0.5 percent permethrin.
- Apply insect repellent that contains 20 percent or more DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 on exposed skin for protection that lasts several hours.
- Walk in the center of trails so grass, shrubs, and weeds do not brush against you.
- Check yourself, children, other family members, and pets for ticks every two to three hours.
- Remove any tick promptly by grasping it with tweezers, as close to the skin as possible and gently, but firmly, pulling it straight out. Wash your hands and the tick bite site with soap and water.

## **Mosquitoes**

The most common mosquito-borne illness in Illinois is West Nile virus. West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of an infected *Culex pipiens*, or “house” mosquito. Mild cases of West Nile virus infections may cause a slight fever or headache. More severe infections are marked by a rapid onset of a high fever with head and body aches, disorientation, tremors, convulsions and, in the most severe cases, paralysis or death. Symptoms usually occur from 3 to 14 days after the bite of an infected mosquito. However, four out of five people infected with West Nile virus will not show any symptoms. People older than 50 are at higher risk for severe illness from West Nile Virus.

There are some simple precautions you can take to *Fight the Bite*. Precautions include practicing the three “R’s” – reduce, repel and report.

- **REDUCE** - make sure doors and windows have tight-fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or other openings. Try to keep doors and windows shut.

Eliminate, or refresh each week, all sources of standing water where mosquitoes can breed, including water in bird baths, ponds, flowerpots, wading pools, old tires, and any other containers.

- **REPEL** - when outdoors, wear shoes and socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, and apply insect repellent that contains DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR 3535, according to label instructions. Consult a physician before using repellents on infants.

- **REPORT** – report locations where you see water sitting stagnant for more than a week such as roadside ditches, flooded yards, and similar locations that may produce mosquitoes. The local health department or city government may be able to add larvicide to the water, which will kill any mosquito eggs.

Additional information about [ticks](#) and [mosquitoes](#) can be found on the [IDPH website](#).