THE BUZZ ABOUT BUGS:
PREVENTING AND TREATING SUMMER INSECT BITES

Warm weather months help us take advantage of the outdoors. But time spent at the beach, hiking, camping or relaxing in the backyard is not without some risk. For example, outdoor time during the summer can increase people’s exposure to insect bites and stings.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), discomfort is not the only concern—insects (such as mosquitoes, bees and ticks) can spread diseases. Limiting exposure is the best way to reduce the risk.

Puneet Chopra, MD, chair and medical director of Observation and Emergency Services at Doctors Community Hospital, shares some tips on how to beat the bugs and avoid a trip to the emergency department this summer.

Q: What are the most common bug bites and how can people tell the difference?
The most common summer insect bites are caused by mosquitoes, ticks, spiders, bees and wasps. Knowing the differences in the appearances of bug bites can help people better treat the symptoms and know when to seek a doctor.

Q: When is medical care needed for an insect bite?
Most bites can be managed at home with an over-the-counter antihistamine, pain-reliever or topical ointment to relieve pain, itching and swelling. People can apply ice or cold washcloths to reduce swelling; and they should try not to scratch the bite to avoid infection. For stings, people should remove the stingers without squeezing it, which could cause more venom to be released.

Some insects can carry diseases, and some people can react severely to bites or stings. If after a bite or sting the symptoms on the back of this page are observed, immediate medical attention is required.
## Insect Bite Appearance Risk of Bite Symptoms that Require Medical Attention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insect</th>
<th>Bite Appearance</th>
<th>Risk of Bite</th>
<th>Symptoms that Require Medical Attention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blacklegged tick also known as deer tick</td>
<td>Small red or discolored bumps</td>
<td>Lyme disease</td>
<td><strong>Within 3 to 30 days of bite:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Fatigue, chills, fever, headache, muscle and joint aches or swollen lymph nodes&lt;br&gt;- Rash that is red or discolored, expands around bite and creates a bull’s-eye appearance and is hot to the touch, not usually painful or itchy</td>
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<tr>
<td>American dog tick or brown tick</td>
<td>Small red or discolored bumps</td>
<td>Rocky Mountain spotted fever</td>
<td><strong>Within 2 to 14 days of bite:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, muscle pain, lack of appetite or red eyes&lt;br&gt;- Rash with small, flat, pink or discolored non-itchy spots on wrists, forearms and ankles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mosquito</td>
<td>Very itchy, round, red, pink or discolored bumps on surface of the skin</td>
<td>West Nile virus</td>
<td><strong>Within 2 to 14 days of bite:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Headache, high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation or confusion, lack of coordination, seizures, sudden muscle weakness or paralysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Widow spider</td>
<td>Mark that looks like a target; bright red or discolored center with a darker ring around it</td>
<td>Reaction, infection</td>
<td><strong>Within 6 to 12 hours of bite:</strong>&lt;br&gt;- Muscle cramps and spasms that start near the bite and then spread and increase in severity with chills, fever, nausea, vomiting, sweating, severe pain (stomach, back, or chest), headache, stupor, restlessness, shock or severely high blood pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bees and wasps</td>
<td>Sharp pain, fading to a dull ache; swollen red or discolored bump with white ring around it</td>
<td>Anaphylactic reaction</td>
<td>For those who are allergic to bees or wasps:&lt;br&gt;- Rapid swelling (around eyes, lips, tongue or throat), difficulty breathing or swallowing, itching, dizziness, red rash or hives, stomach cramps, diarrhea, nausea or loss of consciousness</td>
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</tbody>
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**Q: What methods can be used to keep bugs away?**

The best way to avoid insect bites is to limit exposure.

+ Cover exposed skin with long-sleeved shirts, long pants, closed shoes and hats
+ Avoid areas of tall grass and heavy brush
+ Walk in the center of hiking paths
+ Wear insect repellent

Insect repellent should contain picardin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, IR3535, or 20 percent or more DEET. Follow product directions and reapply as per the product instructions. Apply sunscreen first and insect repellent second. Also, avoid applying bug spray to hands, eyes and mouth, especially on children. Permethrin-treated clothing and camping gear can help.

**The board-certified emergency medical specialists in Doctors Community Hospital’s Emergency Department are available 24/7. They are trained to evaluate insect bite symptoms that require immediate medical attention. Also, its on-site laboratory allows the team to examine test results to provide diagnostic as well as treatment services.**

For more information, please visit [DCHweb.org/emergency](http://DCHweb.org/emergency) or call **301-DCH-4YOU (301-324-4968)**.