

Follow these tricks to be safe from ticks

By Julia Haskins

One of the best parts of summer is the chance to spend more time outdoors, whether hiking in the woods or relaxing in your own backyard.

But with summer also comes disease-carrying ticks, which can quickly spoil your outdoor adventure. Ticks are a serious concern, but you can go outside worry-free if you know how to keep them away. With a little preparation, you can enjoy all the fun of being outdoors with your family and be safe, too.

Robin Jacobson, MD, medical director at the New York University Langone Department of Pediatrics-Irving Place, says it's not the ticks that are dangerous, but diseases they can carry.

You may have heard of Lyme disease, which is spread by black-legged ticks that can be found in the Midwest and eastern U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Lyme disease can cause problems such as severe headaches, arthritis, short-term memory loss and even inflammation in the brain or spinal cord.

Tick-borne diseases are especially harmful for infants and seniors, as well as people who don't have strong immune systems, Jacobson says.

If you live in an area where you're likely to come into contact with ticks, you need to take the right precautions to prevent tick bites. Before you head out, Jacobson recommends covering up with a long-sleeved shirt and pants.

Also wear closed-toed shoes and tuck your pant legs into your socks. That way, it will be harder for ticks to bite your skin. CDC also recommends treating your clothes and gear with products that contain at least 0.5 percent of the chemical permethrin to fend off ticks.

It's important to use repellent directly on your skin as well. Use a product that contains at least 20 percent of the chemicals DEET, picaridin or IR3535, CDC says. Note that some products that are labeled natural may claim to offer effective protection, but they just don't work as



>> For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/ticks

well as repellents with stronger chemicals.

A number of scientific studies, including reviews from the Environmental Protection Agency, have found the recommended chemicals are safe on skin. However, Jacobson notes that they can be dangerous for babies, who may put their hands in their mouths. She recommends putting a bug net on strollers to keep babies safe from ticks.

When you're walking, hiking or camping outside, be mindful of your surroundings. Ticks can often be found in wet, leafy clusters along trails. When walking through wooded areas, stick to the middle of the path where there is less vegetation, and where ticks are less likely to be hiding.

Make sure that children who may wander stay on the path and are never out of sight.

As soon as you get inside, check yourself and your family members for ticks. Ticks' small size makes them difficult to spot, so pay close attention when looking for them. They could be hiding in your hair, clothing, gear or even in your pets' fur.

Help your family do a thorough inspection, encouraging them to check their bodies carefully. Using a mirror can also be helpful. After you've checked your body for ticks, take a shower, then wash and dry your clothes to kill any ticks that may have clung to them. It may seem like a lot to do, but when it comes to keeping ticks off your body, you're better off being extra cautious.

If you do spot a tick, don't fret. The sooner you find and remove a tick, the less likely you

are to contract an illness such as Lyme disease. According to Jacobson, if you can remove a tick within 24 to 48 hours, the chances of becoming sick are very low.

CDC provides these instructions for removing a tick: Place a pair of tweezers as close to the skin as possible, then pull the tick out in an upward motion. Wash the affected area of skin with soap and water, alcohol or iodine. Then wrap up the tick and throw it away.

Keep an eye on the area of skin where you were bitten to watch for symptoms of Lyme disease,

especially a rash that looks like a bulls'-eye. Also pay attention to symptoms such as joint pain, chills, fever or fatigue. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your doctor right away.



Keeping your yard tick-free

Wooded areas aren't the only places you need to watch out for ticks. The good news is you can tick-proof your yard by keeping it clean and tidy. The Minnesota Department of Health recommends keeping your lawn mowed short and clearing leaves and brush from your yard.

Children's playsets can also harbor ticks, so be sure to keep them dry and free from leaves and brush. If your yard shares a border with the woods, set up a three-foot barrier made of wood chips or gravel, CDC suggests.



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