

# For Your Well-being: Bugs, bites and burns: Avoiding summer snags

**Dr. Carolyn Roy-Bornstein**

— With Memorial Day behind us and the kids just about out of school, it seems like a good time to review some basic summer safety.

As their children head off to camp, many parents come to me asking about protection against mosquitoes and other biting insects. Keeping kids covered with long pants and long-sleeved shirts when they are most at risk, such as during the twilight hours, is effective. If an insect repellent is used, a product that contains DEET (diethyltoluamide) is recommended. It should not be used on infants less than 2 months of age and should not be used in concentrations greater than 30 percent. Keep away from the mouth, hands and eyes to avoid internal ingestion. It can be used on skin and clothing and need only be applied once a day. Remove it at night in the bath or shower.

For folks who are looking for a more natural solution, a recent study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found soybean oil-based products and citronella oil-based products to be as effective as DEET, but not as long-lasting. The soybean product studied, Bite Blocker for Kids, offered protection for an average of 1 hour of protection, while the citronella product, Avon's Skin-so-Soft Moisturizing Suncare, lasted only 20 minutes. DEET lasts an average of four hours.

If your child tends to develop particularly large reactions to mosquito bites, a prophylactic dose of an antihistamine such as Benadryl can be used when exposure is unavoidable.

Early summer is prime tick season and with ticks come concerns about Lyme disease. The bacteria that cause Lyme live in the gut of deer ticks, which are quite tiny in comparison to dog ticks. In order for ticks to transmit disease they must be attached to the skin for at least 36 to 72 hours, so checking children each night can go a long way toward disease prevention.

Children should be checked carefully for ticks at the end of each day of outside play, especially in hair and along neck lines as well as in armpits and groins. If a tick is found, use fine-tip tweezers to remove it, grasping as close to the head as possible and pulling straight up. If a little piece of the head is left behind, it can stay. It will not increase the risk of Lyme disease, but it may act as a foreign body and increase the risk of infection so just be sure to keep it clean. DEET is effective against tick bites as well.

Lastly, a warning against too much sun. Try to keep babies in the shade and young children covered with lightweight clothing and wide-brimmed hats as much as possible. Sunscreen should be applied to children over 6 months of age 30 minutes before exposure and should be at least a 15 SPF (sun protective factor).

Various forms of sunscreen are available. Clear sticks may be best for faces to avoid spraying into mouths and eyes. White creams allow parents to be certain all surfaces have been covered, a goal harder to achieve with clear sprays. Even if a sunblock is waterproof, it needs to be reapplied after swimming or every couple of hours. Some children's clothing now comes with sunblock equivalent to a UV protection factor of over 30. Though the clothing items are a bit pricey, they obviate the need for applying sunscreen underneath clothes. Teens especially need to be warned against the dangers of not only natural sunlight but tanning beds too, which also impart dangerous UV rays. Less dangerous tanning mists or sprays are suitable alternatives. So enjoy the summer. Stay clear of bugs, bites and burns. And know where your kids are and who they're with. A well-supervised child is a well-loved one.

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