

**Public Health Advisory
September 2014**

Recreational Activities and the Risk of Diseases Spread by Mosquitoes and Ticks

Summer is coming to a close, but that does not lessen the risk of tick-borne diseases such as Lyme disease or mosquito-borne diseases such as West Nile virus (WNV) and Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE).

Ticks that spread Lyme disease are found in many parts of Vermont, and are active almost year round. The number of people diagnosed with Lyme disease has increased significantly over the past 10 years in many parts of the state. Ticks are most active in the fall, usually starting in late September. Ticks will go dormant once it become cold, but they typically emerge again in the spring when it warms up which is usually in April. Ticks can be active any time the temperature goes above 40°F.

The peak time for mosquitoes that spread these viruses to people is generally in late summer and early fall, up until a hard frost occurs. This is also the time of year that school sports and fall leagues begin their outdoor practices. This fall, WNV is likely circulating in most parts of the state, and all Vermonters are at some risk for getting ill with this disease. In the past few years, EEE virus has been found in just a few localized areas, but it is possible the virus is more widespread.

To see if you are in a known area of increased risk for EEE, review the risk map and surveillance data at <http://www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/arbovirus/surveillance/index.aspx>

Participation in outdoor activities at any time of day increases exposure to ticks and mosquitoes. Children and adults participate in sports and recreational activities during the evening when many kinds of mosquitoes are most actively biting. In addition, physical exertion and sweating can attract mosquitoes and may decrease the time that repellents are effective.

By taking a few commonsense precautions, people can protect themselves against ticks and mosquitoes while still enjoying outdoor activities.

- **Schedule outdoor activity to avoid peak mosquito hours.** The hours from dusk to dawn are peak mosquito biting times for many mosquitoes. Consider avoiding outdoor activities during these times.
- **Clothing can help reduce tick and mosquito bites.** When you are outdoors, wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants and socks. This may be difficult to do when the weather is hot, but it will help to keep ticks and mosquitoes away from your skin.
- **Eliminate all areas of standing water.** Mosquitoes need water to reproduce.
- **Create a tick-safe zone around on our property.** For more information see Landscaping to Control Ticks at <http://healthvermont.gov/prevent/lyme/landscape.aspx>.

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- **Apply insect repellent when you go outdoors.** A wide variety of insect repellent products are available.
 - Always follow the instructions on the product label.
 - The repellents that are most effective against **both** mosquitoes and ticks contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) or permethrin.
 - DEET products can be used directly on skin and on clothing. Products containing DEET should not be used on children younger than 2 months of age.
 - Permethrin products are designed to be used on clothing and should not be used directly on skin.
 - Products containing Picaridin (KBR 3023) are only effective against mosquitoes.
 - Products containing oil of lemon eucalyptus [p-methane 3, 8-diol (PMD)] have also been found to provide as much protection against mosquitoes as low concentrations of DEET. Products containing oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children younger than 3 years of age.

- **Check for Ticks after Spending Time Outdoors.** Thoroughly check your skin for ticks that may have attached themselves while you were outdoors. Young deer ticks, called nymphs, are the size of a poppy seed. Adult deer ticks are the size of a sesame seed. When doing a tick check, remember that ticks like places that are warm and moist. Always check the back of the knees, armpits, groin, scalp, back of the neck and behind the ears. If you find a tick attached to your body, remove it as soon as possible using a fine-point tweezers. Do not squeeze or twist the tick's body, but grasp it close to your skin and pull straight out with steady pressure.

For more information about insect repellents and safe use of repellents, please see the VDH fact sheet at: <http://www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/arbovirus/repellents.aspx> .

General information on mosquito-borne diseases can be obtained by visiting the VDH web site at: <http://www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/arbovirus/index.aspx> .

General information on Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases can be found on the VDH website at: http://www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/zoonotic/tickborne/Tickborne_diseases.aspx.