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Frequently Asked Questions About Insect Repellants

Q. How often should you re-apply repellents?

A. Follow the directions on the product you are using. Sweating or getting wet may mean that you need to re-apply more frequently.

Q. How does the percentage of active ingredient in a product relate to the amount of protection it gives?

A. Typically, the more active ingredient a product contains the longer it provides protection from mosquito bites. The concentration of different active ingredients cannot be directly compared (that is, 10% concentration of one product does not mean it works exactly the same as 10% concentration of another product).

DEET is an effective active ingredient found in many repellent products and in a variety of formulations.

- A product containing 23.8% DEET provides an average of 5 hours of protection from mosquito bites.
- A product containing 20% DEET provides almost 4 hours of protection
- A product containing 6.65% DEET provided almost 2 hours of protection.
- Products with 4.75% DEET are able to provide roughly 1½ hours of protection.

These examples provide a general idea of how such products may work. Actual protection will vary widely based on conditions such as temperature, perspiration, and water exposure.

Hint: Applying permethrin to your clothing ahead of time will give you even better protection.

Remember: If you are getting bitten, do something about it!!

Choose a repellent that you will use consistently. Also, choose a product that will provide sufficient protection for the amount of time that you will be spending outdoors. Product labels often indicate the length of time that you can expect protection from a product. If you are concerned about using insect repellent, consult your health care provider for advice.

Q. Can insect repellents be used by pregnant or nursing women?

A. Other than the routine precautions on the directions for use of the product you are using, EPA does not recommend any additional precautions for using registered repellents on pregnant or lactating women.

Q. What are some reactions to be aware of when using insect repellents containing DEET?

A. Products containing DEET are considered to be safe when used according to the manufacturer's directions. In some instances, the use of repellents that contain DEET may cause skin reactions. Eye irritation can occur if product gets in the eye. If product gets in the eyes, flush with water and consult a health care provider. If you suspect a reaction to a product, discontinue use, wash all affected areas, and contact a medical provider. If you go to a doctor, take the product with you. Products should not be ingested.

General Considerations for Using Repellants Safely on Children

- No more than 30% DEET should be used on children and adults.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that repellents with DEET should not be used on

infants less than 2 months old.

- The label for products containing oil of lemon eucalyptus specifies that they should not be used on children under the age of three years.
- When using repellent on a child, apply it to your own hands and then rub them on your child. Avoid children's eyes and mouth and use it sparingly around their ears.
- Never use repellents over cuts, wounds, or irritated skin.
- Do not apply repellent to children's hands. (Children may tend to put their hands in their mouths.)
- Keep repellents out of reach of children.
- Do not apply repellent under clothing.

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