



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

NICK LYON
DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 22, 2015

CONTACT: Jennifer Smith
(517) 241-2112

MDHHS Reminds Residents to “Fight the Bite” During Holiday Weekend, Throughout Summer

LANSING, Mich. – As people spend more time outdoors and the weather continues to warm, it is important to take precautions against mosquito and tick bites. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) would like to urge all residents, especially those recreating outdoors and children at camps, to protect themselves from mosquito and tick-borne diseases.

Seasonal activity varies from year to year, but mosquitoes in Michigan can carry illnesses such as West Nile virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), and ticks can carry illnesses such as Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Mosquito and tick-borne diseases can cause mild symptoms, severe infections requiring hospitalization, and even death.

“One bite from an infected mosquito can lead to a severe and possibly life-altering illness,” said Dr. Eden Wells, chief medical executive for MDHHS. “Preventing bites from mosquitoes is the key to protection.”

Nationally in 2014, there were 2,122 WNV cases and 85 deaths reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). WNV cases have been seen every summer in Michigan since 2002. Those with the highest risk of illness caused by WNV are adults 50 and older.

In addition to presenting a greater risk for older people, EEE is more likely to cause illness in children 15 years of age or younger. People in outdoor occupations like construction and landscaping are at increased risk of getting bitten by an infected mosquito, but the mosquito that carries WNV also likes to get indoors.

Protection against mosquito-borne disease is as easy as remembering to take these key steps:

- **Avoid mosquito bites:** Use insect repellent when outdoors especially from dusk to dawn. Look for EPA-labeled products containing active ingredients, such as DEET, Picaridin (KBR3023), or oil of lemon eucalyptus (p-menthane 3,8-diol). Reapply as needed according to label directions. Use nets or fans around outdoor eating areas to keep mosquitoes away.
- **Mosquito-proof homes:** Fix or install window and door screens and cover or eliminate empty containers with standing water where mosquitoes can lay eggs.
- **Help your community:** Report dead birds to Michigan’s Emerging Diseases website (www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases) to help track WNV and support community-based mosquito control programs.
- **Vaccinate horses** against WNV and Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus.

– MORE –

Michigan is also home to a number of tick species that will bite people. Ticks are typically found in wooded or brushy areas with tall grass and leaf litter. The ticks mostly commonly encountered by people in Michigan include the American dog tick which can carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and the blacklegged tick which can spread a number of human illnesses, including Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is considered to be an emerging disease due to the expansion of tick populations in Michigan's western Upper and Lower Peninsulas and is the most common tick-borne disease reported in the state with 128 human cases reported in 2014, the second highest number ever seen in Michigan. The period from June to September is of concern because of the poppy-seed sized nymphal-stage tick, which is responsible for much of the Lyme disease in the U.S. While rare, human cases of Rocky Mountain spotted fever have also been documented in Michigan.

Many tick-borne diseases have similar symptoms. See your healthcare provider if you develop signs of illness such as a fever, body aches and/or rash in the days after receiving a tick bite or recreating in tick habitat. Early recognition and treatment can decrease the chance of serious complications. You can prevent tick bites by:

- **Avoiding tick-infested areas.** This is especially important in May, June, and July. If you are in tick infested areas, walk in the center of trails to avoid contact with overgrown grass, brush, and leaf litter at trail edges.
- **Using insect repellent.** Spray repellent containing a 20 percent concentration of DEET or Picaridin on clothes and on exposed skin. You can also treat clothes (especially pants, socks, and shoes) with permethrin, which kills ticks on contact or buy clothes that are pre-treated. Permethrin can also be used on tents and some camping gear. Do not use permethrin directly on skin. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when applying any repellents.
- **Bathing or showering.** Bathe or shower as soon as possible after coming indoors (preferably within 2 hours) to wash off and more easily find ticks that are crawling on you. Ticks can get a ride indoors on your clothes. After being outdoors, wash and dry clothing at a high temperature to kill any ticks that may remain on clothing.
- **Performing daily tick checks.** Always check for ticks after being outdoors, even in your own yard. Because ticks must usually be attached for at least a day before they can transmit the bacteria that cause Lyme disease, early removal can reduce the risk of infection. Inspect all body surfaces carefully, and remove attached ticks with tweezers. Grasp the tick firmly and as closely to the skin as possible. With a steady motion, pull the tick's body away from the skin. Do not be alarmed if the tick's mouthparts remain in the skin. Cleanse the area with an antiseptic.

For more information about the diseases carried by mosquitoes and ticks, visit www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases, or the CDC's website at www.cdc.gov.

###