

Steering Clear of Bites and Stings

Gardening, grilling, hiking, camping – all come to mind when you think of warmer weather. However, this time of year also brings bugs and insects out of the woodworks. In the Midwest, some of the most common of these include mosquitoes, bees, wasps, and ticks.

Before venturing into your garden or onto the hiking trail, it is important to keep safety top of mind. Ashley Lisek, an APN with OSF Medical Group, discusses safety tips and prevention as well as what to do if you experience any bites or stings.

Ashley Lisek, APN, Family Medicine, OSF HealthCare

“If you are going to be in any wooded area I really recommend a long sleeve shirt and pants as well as close-toed shoes so you can avoid concerns of getting any tick bites and minimize mosquito bites. Also use mosquito sprays, I would definitely recommend doing that as well. And really just checking yourself if you are out in the woods all day. Make sure you check your body over once for ticks, make sure there is nothing stuck to you – because sometimes you don’t even know they latch on.” (:27)

The Illinois Department for Health (IDPH) recommends walking in the center of trails so weeds do not brush against you. And when outside for prolonged periods of time, check yourself every two to three hours for ticks. Once you are home, you should shower within a couple of hours from coming indoors according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This step has been shown to reduce your risk of getting Lyme disease and may be effective in reducing the risk of other tick-borne illnesses. Additionally, showering may help wash off unattached ticks – and it is a good opportunity to do a thorough tick check.

Common symptoms of a tick-related illness include fever/chills, aches/pains, or a rash. The most important spots to check for ticks include: under the arms, in and around the ears, inside the belly button, back of the knees, in and around the hair, between the legs, and around the waist.

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“If you do see a tick physically on you, you should seek emergency treatment so that we can make sure you get it out. A lot of times people will look online how to remove a tick and then put things on it that are not actually supposed to be on it or won’t help remove a tick that’s on you – so if you have a tick on you or you think you have a tick bite, or any kind of bullseye rash starts to develop where you think you could have been bitten by a tick, I recommend you seek emergency treatment.” (:25)

What you wear can and how you smell can also make a difference. The CDC recommends wearing light-colored clothing when outside to deter biting insects. Experts also recommend applying Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered [insect repellent](#) every time you venture outside. Additionally, Lisek recommends keeping the fruity fragrances at bay.

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“Try to eliminate any extra perfumes or lotions that could be sweet or scented in order to avoid attracting them.” (:10)

Some pests are attracted to food. Experts say to discard food far from where you will likely be spending your time outside. If possible, store outdoor household trash cans further away from the house as well in order to keep wasps away and deter them from building a nest close to your home.

If you do experience a sting, you should first wash the site of the sting with soap and water and use ice to stop it from swelling. The severity of the sting can depend on the [type of bee or wasp](#) that stung you, in addition to whether or not you are allergic. While most flying insect stings are easy to treat, some do require immediate medical attention.

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“If you get stung and you start having any itching or irritation, any hives, or swelling that makes you feel like you’re having a hard time swallowing – I would seek emergency treatment because you could be having an allergic reaction.” (:12)

To find an urgent care near you, go to www.osfhealthcare.org. If you or a loved one is experiencing a medical emergency caused by a bite or sting – regardless of being caused by a mosquito, bee, wasp, tick, or even a spider – go to your nearest ER or call 911.