

Script – Print – The buzz on mosquitoes

Perhaps no one is happier to see the arrival of summer than those pesky mosquitoes that invade our space over the next three months.

Seemingly, they're everywhere. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are 3,700 types of mosquitoes around the world, wreaking havoc. They'll try to ruin your picnic, they love it when you relax in the backyard and they feast on anything that's happening near a body of water.

According to the CDC, only female mosquitoes bite people and animals to get a blood meal, which they need to produce eggs. Adult mosquitoes live for about two to four weeks, depending on the species, humidity and temperature.

But why do some people tend to be mosquito magnets while others get off scot-free?

There are plenty of reasons, including blood type (most mosquitoes like Type O), body heat (female mosquitoes detect heat) and even diet (eating sweet, salty or spicy foods can draw mosquitoes). One [study](#) even suggests mosquitoes are attracted to people who drink beer, although experts aren't sure why.

"Mosquitoes bite us for their nutrition, and some people are more apt to be bitten than others," says Breanne Gendron, a nurse practitioner with OSF HealthCare. "Mosquitoes are drawn to dark colors. But then once they get closer to you, they smell carbon dioxide and lactic acid that lives in our bodies. And some people have a higher level of those things than others."

Gendron says most mosquito bites don't require medical attention and only last a few days. However, certain mosquitoes can carry serious diseases.

"Mosquito bites in general are just annoying and itchy, but you can get more serious infections from mosquitoes, such as Zika virus or West Nile virus. Our animals sometimes get these infections too," she says.

West Nile virus is the leading cause of mosquito-borne disease in the United States, reports the CDC. While many people with West Nile don't exhibit any symptoms, others can develop fevers, body aches and fatigue. In the Midwest, the first mosquito-borne West Nile virus cases in 2025 were found in a bird in Michigan's Saginaw County and a mosquito pool in Bay County. In Illinois, the health departments in DuPage and McHenry counties confirmed the first cases of West Nile virus in June of this year.

Treatment

As difficult as it may be, try not to scratch that itch. Gendron says it's better to rub a bite. By scratching skin abrasions, bacteria from your fingernails could lead to a secondary bacterial infection.

"The more you are exposed to bites, the itchier you become," says Gendron. "Because your body is exposed to the [bug's] saliva, you have an immune response and your histamines release. It makes a little red, itchy bump. These can be really pronounced, especially in young kids, because their immune systems are boisterous."

Gendron says at that point, you're just managing the itch. She recommends using over-the-counter medications such as calamine lotion or Benadryl.

Prevention

Gendron offers a few other helpful tips to get you through the summer months.

- Wear loose, long-sleeved shirts and long pants outdoors, especially between dusk and dawn.
- Always use insect repellent when you're outside. Look for ones with DEET, picaridin or IR3535 on the label.
- Avoid spraying repellent near your face and wash any repellent off before you go to bed.
- Certain plants can help naturally repel mosquitoes with their scents, including lavender, citronella, basil and rosemary.
- Empty standing water from containers around your home, like flowerpots, buckets and birdbaths.
- Clean your gutters, trim your grass and repair window and door screens.

"They're more likely to be out, bothering people, near bodies of water," Gendron says. "They're next to the lake when you're camping, for example. Those are the types of places mosquitoes hang out, because they generally live where it's damp."

The bottom line is to be careful, take precautions but enjoy your outdoor activities. Don't let a few annoying mosquitoes ruin the fun. That would be a buzzkill.