

INSECT BITE AVOIDANCE FACT SHEET



KEY FACTS

- People who travel often get bitten by insects
- Some bites cause irritation, while others lead to allergic reactions or infections at the bite site
- Insects spread serious diseases like malaria, dengue, chikungunya, Zika and yellow fever
- Avoiding insect bites is a key measure to prevent infection, even for diseases where vaccines and preventive medicines exist

SYMPTOMS

- Pain, swelling, redness and itching at the bite site
- Some people may have severe allergic reactions, such as anaphylaxis
- For many diseases spread by insects, there is a delay between the bite and when the illness starts

PREVENTION

- Apply **insect repellent** on the skin
- Wear long clothes **treated with insecticide** or **insect repellent**
- Use **insecticide-treated bed nets**
- Stay in **air-conditioned** or **screened places**
- Spray **insecticide** in rooms or use plug-in devices
- Follow preventive measures **around the clock** as insects can bite during the day and night

TREATMENT

- **Wash the bite area** with soap and water
- Apply a **cold compress** (clean cloth soaked in cold water) or **ice pack** to reduce swelling
- Antihistamine and numbing creams might not help and can cause hypersensitivity.
- A short course of **steroid cream** may help.
- If the bite area gets more red, hot, painful, or starts leaking pus, **seek medical help**

MORE INFORMATION

Travelers are advised to check official health information from their own country, such as:

- Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, United States: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/avoid-bug-bites>
- Travel Health Pro, United Kingdom <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/38/insect-and-tick-bite-avoidance>
- Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/insect-bite-prevention.html>
- Health Direct, Australia: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/insect-bites-and-stings>
- National Health Service, United Kingdom <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insect-bites-and-stings/>

References

1. John-Paul Mutebi, John Gimnig. Mosquitoes, Ticks & Other Arthropods. CDC Yellow Book (2024). Available from <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2024/environmental-hazards-risks/mosquitoes-ticks-and-other-arthropods> [Accessed 11/11/23]
2. Chiodini PL, Patel D and Goodyer L. Guidelines for malaria prevention in travellers from the United Kingdom, 2023. London: UK Health Security Agency. Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/malaria-prevention-guidelines-for-travellers-from-the-uk> [Accessed 11/11/23]

This fact sheet was developed by Jane Chiodini MSc in collaboration with the International Society of Travel Medicine Digital Communications Committee.