



Insect Bite Avoidance

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

This fact sheet was developed by Jane Chiodini MSc in collaboration with the ISTM Digital Communications Committee.



Images courtesy of G. Flaherty.



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](#)
- [Travel Health Pro, United Kingdom](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [Health Direct, Australia](#)
- [National Health Service, United Kingdom](#)

REFERENCES

1. C. Roxanne Connelly and John E. Gimnig. Mosquitoes, Ticks & Other Arthropods. CDC Yellow Book (2026). Available from <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2024/environmental-hazards-risks/mosquitoes-ticks-and-other-arthropods>
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]



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