



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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NORTH CAROLINA HEALTH OFFICIALS ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS TO ‘FIGHT THE BITE!’

RALEIGH – State environmental and public health officials are reminding all North Carolinians that warmer weather and rain bring mosquitoes and ticks, which carry dangerous diseases.

All North Carolinians are urged to take simple steps to prevent the threat of biting insects and reduce insect breeding conditions around the home.

“Spring rains and warmer weather provide ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes and ticks,” said State Health Director Jeff Engel. “Ticks and mosquitoes can be more than just a nuisance – they can also make people seriously ill. Now is the time to fight the bite!”

Nolan Newton, chief of the Public Health Pest Management Section of the Division of Environmental Health, said that people can take steps to prevent illness.

“You can make your backyard a lot less tick-friendly,” Newton said. “Keep grass short and remove plants that attract wild animals like deer and rodents, which carry ticks.”

Newton said that removing any containers that hold water will take away mosquito breeding grounds.

“Take a good look at your environment now, before the mosquitoes really start biting,” he added. “Things like bird baths, old tires, planters and even small containers like tin cans can give mosquitoes a place to thrive.”

Newton added that people should remember to make sure they tightly secure screens on all openings on rain barrels used for water conservation. A window screen makes an excellent screening mechanism on rain barrels to prevent breeding grounds for mosquitoes, while allowing you to continue your conservation efforts.

Engel and Newton said that insect repellent also can be useful, particularly against mosquitoes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend several repellents against mosquitoes – DEET, picaridin and oil of lemon eucalyptus. According to the CDC, oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under three years old. Repellents containing permethrin provide excellent protection against ticks but may only be used on clothing. Consumers should look for products that contain the CDC-recommended ingredients, and should read and follow all label instructions.

Exposure to both mosquitoes and ticks can be limited by wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks. People should also check themselves and their families for ticks when they are in tick-prone areas.

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Proper and prompt removal of ticks is the key to preventing infection. Use fine-tipped tweezers to remove ticks, getting as far forward near the head as possible and pulling steadily. Note the day you removed the tick on a calendar. If you become ill in the next three weeks, be sure to tell your physician the date you removed the tick.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is the most common tick-borne illness in North Carolina. According to the N.C. Division of Public Health, 515 cases of Rocky Mountain spotted fever were reported in North Carolina in 2008. The state also has other tick-borne illnesses. Last year, North Carolina had 59 reported cases of Lyme disease and 41 reported cases of ehrlichiosis. Tick-borne diseases occur statewide.

La Crosse virus is the most common mosquito-borne illness. La Crosse virus is found mostly in western North Carolina. Two other mosquito-borne diseases, Eastern equine encephalitis and West Nile virus, are also found in North Carolina. While Eastern equine encephalitis is found largely in the eastern part of the state, West Nile virus is found statewide.

For additional information on mosquitoes and ticks, visit the following Web sites:

www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/phpm, www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/arbovirus and www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/tick.

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