

Insect Repellent and Sunscreen Use in Pregnancy: Striking a Balance



It is recommended that you protect yourself from insect bites to prevent insect-borne illness. Mosquitos can carry Eastern Equine Encephalitis and West Nile Virus, and, in affected parts of the world, other illnesses including Zika virus and malaria. Ticks can carry Lyme Disease.

The benefit of immediate protection from known hazardous infections is considered to outweigh the risk of exposure to the chemicals in insect repellents, when they are used according to the guidelines. Recommended insect repellents contain:

- Picardin 5– 10%
- DEET 7 – 10% or 20 – 30% (see guide)*
- IR3535 20%.

Botanical products such as Citronella, Pennyroyal, and Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus are not recommended for small children and therefore not recommended in pregnancy. This includes Citronella candles, which have not been shown to be effective, and which can expose you to inhaled product.

To help you select the right insect repellent for you, as well as to read about other ways to prevent insect bites, this web page has a useful guide*:

<http://www.ewg.org/research/ewgs-guide-bug-repellents/pregnant>

More information can also be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/westnile/faq/repellent.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/zika/pregnancy/index.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/lyme/index.html>

No product can guarantee 100% protection, but following these tips can reduce your risk:

- Limit the time you spend outdoors in places where bug bites are likely.
- Wear light colored, long clothing, and spray repellent on your clothing, taking care not to inhale the spray, then apply directly to exposed areas.
- Wash your hands after applying insect repellent.
- Change your clothing and shower after coming indoors.
- Wash insect-repellent treated clothing separately from your other items.
- Check your home for gaps around windows and doors, or holes in your screens, and repair any areas that could let insects into your house.
- Do not allow standing water to accumulate, e.g. in planters, old tires, etc.

It's also important to prevent sunburn – your skin may be more susceptible to sun damage during pregnancy, which can increase your skin cancer risk. It's best to use separate products for sunscreen and insect repellent, as you will want to apply sunscreen more often than repellents. Apply sunscreen first.

Avoid products containing oxybenzone, which may interfere with hormones, and retinoids - retinyl, retinol, Vitamin A, palmitate, or hexadecanoate - which may increase the risk of birth defects. For more information:

<http://www.ewg.org/2015sunscreen/faqs-your-sunscreen-questions-our-answers>