



Hurray for Summer! Protect your Loved Ones from Summer Pests.

With extremely cold temperatures this winter and concerns about COVID-19, you may be anxious to get outside and enjoy the sunshine. Summer is finally here (hurray!) and there are healthy ways to enjoy the great outdoors. But beware, mosquitoes and ticks that breed and mature in summer months can cause irreversible health issues if they transmit diseases to humans. These pests have already been spotted in our region, so it is time to be on alert and stock up your medicine cabinet in order to keep these pests away.

During summer months more people are out enjoying activities such as hiking, biking, camping or fishing, and may unknowingly bring home unwelcome “hitchhikers”. Tick-borne illnesses that are most frequently reported in the South Heartland district include Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF), and less commonly, Ehrlichiosis, Tularemia and Lyme disease. Common symptoms may include fever, rash, muscle pain, joint pain, fatigue and headache. It is important to report mosquito or tick exposures to your provider if you are ill.

If you spend time outside working or enjoy outdoor recreation, the following tips will help to keep you tick-free:

- Wear light-colored clothing which makes it easier to spot ticks that have attached themselves to your clothing. Tuck long pants legs into your socks to prevent ticks from crawling inside pants legs.
- Use chemical insect repellents containing DEET or Permethrin. Read and follow the label directions prior to application of these products.
- Perform thorough tick checks at least daily if you have been outside in areas that could be infested with ticks. Check everywhere a tick could hide: under the arms, in and around ears, inside the belly button, as well as in and around hair. Be sure to check children or older adults carefully after they have played or worked outside.

Did you know that the CDC researchers have discovered that a naturally occurring compound called nootkatone, found in grapefruit, Alaska yellow cedar trees, and some herbs, can kill or repel ticks and insects. On August 10, 2020, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered [nootkatone](#), for use in repellents and insecticides. You may see nootkatone as an active ingredient in repellents in the upcoming years, but few repellent products sold currently contain nootkatone.

It is difficult to predict hotspots for transmission or how many Nebraskans will be infected, but early reports from ER visits show a twofold increase in visits related to tick bites this season. Tickborne illness can be difficult to detect and can produce serious health problems if not diagnosed and treated early. Several labs have already been reported to South Heartland with confirmed disease or exposure in May.

If, in spite of prevention methods, you find a tick, it should be removed promptly. The best way to remove a tick from the skin is with a pair of tweezers. Grasp the tick as close as possible to the skin, and pull firmly upward to dislodge the mouth parts from the skin. Try to avoid leaving parts of the tick under the skin, as this can also lead to infection. Clean the tick bite with an antiseptic such as an iodine scrub, rubbing alcohol, or water containing detergents. You may save the tick in a crush-proof container should it be needed for testing at a later time. After removing or handling the tick, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

COVID had a significant impact on the number of West Nile virus cases reported by DHHS last summer. Only thirteen new cases were reported last season and none of them occurred in the South Heartland or Central District (Hall Co.) areas. The most Nebraskans infected by West Nile was 2,366 cases in 2003 and that year also brought 29 deaths.

Approximately 80% of individuals who are infected with West Nile virus do not show any symptoms. Unfortunately, the other 20% experience mild symptoms consisting of fever, headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach, and back. These symptoms can last from just a few days to several weeks. Most people with mild symptoms recover on their own but for others, the symptoms may last for weeks or months.

Remember these four “D”s of effective prevention: Dusk to dawn (avoid outdoor activity or take extra care to protect yourself), Dress Appropriately (long sleeves, pants, socks when outside during the peak hours and locations of mosquito activity), DEET (in your mosquito repellent), Drain (any standing water). Remind your loved ones and friends of these easy steps to “Fight the Bite”.

Now is great time to assess your home environment. Eliminate any areas where mosquitoes or ticks may breed, which includes standing water and tall grass. Empty standing water from anything that might serve as a container: flower pots, gutters, tires, buckets, etc. Drill a drainage hole in tire swings and frequently (at least weekly) empty and replace the water in outdoor pet bowls, children’s wading pools, or bird baths and use screens when your window are open.

The fear of contracting West Nile virus or tick-borne disease does not have to keep you locked inside during the summer months. A few simple precautions can allow you to safely enjoy outdoor recreational activities and improve cardiovascular fitness!

For more information call South Heartland District Health Department at 402-462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595 or visit the SHDHD website: www.southheartlandhealth.org

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