

PARENTS

What Parents And Pregnant Women Need To Know About Zika Protection

When in doubt, go with DEET.

05/19/2016 03:47 pm ET

590



Catherine Pearson
Women & Parents Senior Reporter, The Huffington Post



GETTY IMAGES

To date, there has not been a single case of the Zika virus contracted in the United States. But experts generally believe it's [only a matter of time](#) before there are clusters of the virus spread by mosquitoes here. And given that summer — i.e. mosquito season — is upon us, a lot of parents and parents-to-be suddenly feel like they're on high alert about the virus for the first time.

Though the disease is usually pretty mild, it [can cause](#) rash, fever, and joint pain, plus Zika infection during pregnancy [can lead to birth defects](#), including microcephaly. What repellents are safe to use? Here's what you need to know about keeping yourself, and your family, safe.

When in doubt, go with DEET.

There is no vaccine to help protect against Zika, so preventing mosquito bites is key. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends](#) using an EPA-registered insect repellent, which includes a few different options, but experts like Omar Akbari, an assistant professor in the department of entomology at the University of California, Riverside, really believe DEET is the best.

TRENDING

Margot Robbie Is The Perfect Ivanka Trump For 'Celebrity Family Feud' On 'SNL'

Donald Trump's Campaign Isn't Denying He Paid Zero In Federal Taxes Over The Years

Michael Che Definitely Dropped The N-Word During The 'Saturday Night Live' Premiere

Male Writer Outs Female Writer Who Wanted Anonymity

Colombia Plunged Into Uncertainty As Voters Narrowly Reject Peace Deal With FARC Rebels

SUBSCRIBE AND FOLLOW

Get top stories and blog posts emailed to me each day. Newsletters may offer personalized content or advertisements.
[Learn more](#)

address@email.com

[Subscribe Now](#) →



444 K



Podcast



Add us on Snapchat

“DEET is the oldest option. It was produced by the military and has been on the market since the gold standard,” he told The Huffington Post. “It has gone through the most tests.” People sometimes worry [about the potential toxicity of DEET](#), but the CDC says it is absolutely [safe for pregnant and nursing women](#), as well as children age 2 months or older. Even the Environmental Working Group, which works to improve consumer safety when it comes to potentially harmful personal care products, has [concluded](#) that DEET is generally safer than many people think.

“The most effective mosquito repellent with the longest duration of effect is DEET,” agreed Dr. Ericka Hayes, an infectious disease specialist at St. Louis Children’s Hospital, explaining that duration of effect is directly linked to the concentration (so, the higher the concentration, the longer you’re protected). The [CDC makes it clear](#) that there are no benefits to using a concentration over 50 percent, and [Consumer Reports suggests](#) avoiding repellents with concentrations that go above 30 percent.

“For younger children, generally you want to use lower concentrations [of] 10 percent to 30 percent,” Hayes said. Also, don’t let children under the age of 10 apply it themselves.

If DEET’s not your thing, there are alternative repellents.

Picardin is a DEET alternative that has comparable efficacy to low concentrations of DEET, says Hayes — and it’s been pretty well studied. Other EPA-approved alternatives include a chemical called IR3535, as well as oil of lemon eucalyptus. However, parents who are intrigued by the more natural-sounding lemon eucalyptus oil should be aware of a couple things. First, it has been refined so that it’s very different from an unprocessed tree oil, [EWG points out](#). And it’s not recommended for use [in children younger](#) than 3.

The question of efficacy is a bit trickier. Just because something’s been EPA-approved, doesn’t mean it necessarily works all that well. [Consumer Reports found](#) that the best repellents for protecting against Aedes mosquitoes, which carry Zika, were a DEET-based option as well as one with 20 percent Picardin. [They advised against](#) using most products with natural plant oils because they simply weren’t that effective, and some just outright failed.

It’s important to think beyond repellents.

If your baby is 2 months or younger, you shouldn’t use a repellent at all. Instead, if you’re worried about protecting your infant, the CDC recommends putting mosquito netting over his or her crib, stroller, or carrier and dressing your baby in long clothing to avoid exposed skin. Same goes for anyone who is spending a lot of time outside, but particularly if you’re pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant any time soon.

And parents can also do simple things around the home to help prevent mosquito bites. “Make sure that in your house, you have screens that are properly secured so that mosquitoes can’t enter,” said Akbari. If you have a pond or any area with standing water on your property, check to make sure there aren’t mosquito larvae and treat it if there are. Even if Zika doesn’t necessarily come to your area, these are simple steps parents can take to help keep mosquitoes at bay, he said. “I think generally,” Akbari chuckled

