



Vector-Borne Disease Prevention - Communicating with Patients & Families

Why talk with your patients about vector-borne disease risk and prevention?

As tick and mosquito-borne diseases spread in Maine, patients may not completely understand the risk of infection from ticks and mosquitoes. Risk can be heightened depending on geographic location, and amount of time spent outside. As you know, understanding risk and taking preventative measures is key to avoiding vector-borne disease. With this in mind, recommended messaging around the risk and best practice prevention strategies are provided below to help providers easily communicate with their patients and their families.

Communicating risk:

- Ticks:
 - Ticks can carry diseases that can make children and adults sick. These diseases are becoming common in Maine, and it's important to take precautions to keep your family protected.
 - When it comes to ticks, a small bite can be a big deal. Deer ticks, also called black-legged ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*), can carry diseases including Lyme Disease. If you find a deer tick attached to your child and think attached for 36 hours or more (appears swollen not flat), please let us know. You should also call our office if your child develops a rash, fever, or feels ill within a few weeks of being bitten by a tick.
- Mosquitos:
 - Mosquitos can also carry diseases that can make us ill, though cases are still very rare in Maine. If serious illness presents after a bite, call the office to discuss your child's symptoms, which may include fever, headaches, muscle and joint pain, fatigue, dizziness, stomach issues, and rashes.
- Whenever your child spends time outdoors, whether they're playing in the yard, helping you plant flowers in the garden, or taking a walk or hike, it's important to take precautions to prevent bites.
- The best way to protect your child from tick and mosquito related illnesses is to take precautions to avoid them getting bites.

Encouraging prevention:

- **Wear insect repellent:** Just like sunscreen, an EPA-registered insect repellent should be applied before spending time outdoors when anticipate potential exposure to mosquitoes and ticks.
- **Limit exposed skin:** When spending prolonged time outdoors, wearing long sleeved shirts and long pants, with the pants tucked into socks, and light-colored clothing help protect you and make ticks easier to spot.
- **When you return indoors:** Make sure to check yourself, your pets, young children, and any outdoor gear thoroughly for ticks. Pay special attention to your child's hair, ears, underarms, waistline, between the legs, and behind the knees.
- **Prepare your property:** You can make your property less hospitable to ticks and mosquitoes by keeping your lawn mowed, and trimming back brush and debris. Limiting the amount of still and standing water on your property can prevent mosquitoes from breeding.