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It's time for fun in the sun but beware of bad bugs



Travis K. Fischer
Mid-America
Publishing

The weather is warming up, and that means everybody is eager to get outside.

However, it also means that all the pesky critters outside are starting to get active as well. Rising temperatures don't just mean the start of planting season and gardening season and hiking season. It also means the start of tick season.

As the crawling critters get around looking for a host to feed on, humans need to be vigilant about not ending up on the dinner menu, particularly as feeding ticks can transmit harmful bacteria, resulting in disease.

One of the most common diseases carried by ticks is Lyme disease, which is caused by a bacterial transfer from the tick to the human.

Often diagnosed by the bullseye shaped rash it leaves around the bite mark, Lyme disease can result in a range of symptoms that can appear from days to months after the tick bite.

"If you have it (the rash), it is indicative of Lyme disease, and you should see a health professional immediately," said Dr. Patricia

Quinlisk, the State Epidemiologist and Medical Director of the Iowa Department of Public Health.

Lyme disease isn't the only illness to worry about either. Ticks can carry organisms that cause serious illnesses like ehrlichiosis or anaplasmosis, or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, a potentially deadly disease that begins with a fever before the victim breaks out into a severe rash.

"It's one that can be quite serious," said Quinlisk. "You would become much sicker than you would become with Lyme disease."

Of course an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The best way to keep from catching ailments like Lyme disease or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever is to keep from being bit by ticks and mosquitoes in the first place.

The Department of Public Health recommends that before heading out for any outdoor activities, people take steps to protect themselves. Avoid wooded areas with high grass and leaf litter, tuck your pant legs in to your socks, and use insect repellent containing DEET.

However, keep in mind that insect repellent itself can pose health hazards and that the appropriate concentrations should be used.

"You don't want to use any more than necessary," said Quinlisk.

Regardless of the concentration, it's best to avoid spraying your hands to keep from spreading the repellent to your eyes or mouth, particularly in the case of children. It's also recommended to shower as soon as possible when you no longer need the protection.

Be it a tick or a mosquito, if you begin to show symptoms of illness,

it's important to tell your doctor if you think you've been bitten by something so they can provide an accurate diagnosis.

"If would be something you would want to mention to your health provider," said Quinlisk. "If you start to get sick, mention it to them."

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