

## Insect Bite Avoidance

One of the most common problems when visiting hot climates is insect bites. Taking steps to avoid insect bites will not only make your holiday more pleasant, but will also prevent potential health problems like allergies, skin infections and malaria. The mainstay of insect bite prevention is insect repellents which I discuss in another article on [www.whelehans.ie](http://www.whelehans.ie).

### Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes are an irritation in most hot climates including Southern Europe and North America. However their bite can have more profound health consequences if you are travelling to Africa, Asia or Central and South America, as mosquitoes transmit diseases such as yellow fever, dengue fever and malaria in these areas. Only the female mosquito bites. The female's blood meal is important for the development of her eggs. The reasons mosquitoes are attracted to some people more than others is not fully understood. Chemoreceptors on mosquito antenna can detect minute quantities of substances released by the human skin. The two most important are believed to be lactic acid and carbon dioxide. Mosquitoes also rely on body heat and moisture to determine where to bite once in close range of an individual. Some perfumes and scented lotions and cosmetics can attract mosquitoes. Mosquitoes can find a human by sight or by detecting movement. There appears to be a gender difference in attracting mosquito, with studies showing that females get significantly more bites than males. Children tend to get bitten less than adults. Larger people tend to get bitten more than smaller people. Mosquitoes also seem to be more attracted to those who sweat more.

### Tips to prevent bites from mosquitoes

If you are visiting an area where mosquitoes are a problem there are certain precautions you can take to prevent bites. Stay away from still water as still water such as ponds attracts mosquitoes. Mosquitoes are most active at night, especially at dusk, so avoid spending time outdoors at these times. Mosquitoes are attracted to dark clothing, so wearing white clothes is advised. Bright, floral colours also appear to attract mosquitoes so avoid these colours in your clothing. Mosquitoes find it more difficult to bite through loose fitting than tight fitting clothes. It is particularly important to wear long sleeved clothing and trousers after dark. Avoid perfumes, deodorants and fragrances in soaps, shampoos and lotions as this appears to attract mosquitoes. Mosquitoes do not like cool temperatures so air conditioning and fans reduces the risk of being bitten. Insect repellents are the best method of preventing bites. Sleeping under an insecticide impregnated mosquito net is a very effective method of preventing bites at night, when mosquitoes are most active.

### Other insects you may encounter when abroad

Tsetse flies are found in mid continental Africa and their bite is quite painful. Tsetse flies appear to be attracted by blue clothes and moving objects. They have a tendency to enter through the window of moving vehicles so it is best to keep windows closed when

tsetse flies are about. Tsetse flies are less susceptible to insect repellents than mosquitoes. Insect repellents containing DEET appears to be more effective at preventing tsetse fly bites. Sand flies are blood sucking flies which are common in hotter climates including the Mediterranean, North Africa, Middle East, Central America and the Caribbean. They are tiny flies that look like a midge and generally you they are too small to see. They cause local irritation where they bite. They also carry a less common but debilitating condition called leishmaniasis. Leishmaniasis can cause symptoms such as fever, weight loss, lethargy, cough and diarrhoea and treatment is often undertaken by a specialist in tropical medicine. Prevention of sand fly bites is similar to mosquito bite prevention. This includes using insect repellents, wearing long sleeve shirts, long trousers and socks in the evenings. Sand flies are poor flyers, so avoid sleeping at ground level to prevent bites. Of the other biting insects, ticks and fleas can be found in the undergrowth in tropical and temperate climates. Ticks can transmit a bacterial condition called lyme disease which is characterised by tiredness and needs to be treated with antibiotics. Therefore to prevent bites in affected areas (especially forests), you should keep trousers tucked into socks. Socks should be treated with a DEET repellent.

### **Malaria**

Malaria is a life threatening parasitic disease which is transmitted by mosquitoes. Malaria is preventable and curable. There are certain parts of Africa, Asia, Central and South America where malaria is endemic. There are about 100 countries where malaria occurs at present and those traveling to those countries need to take precautions before travel. Because in recent years, more Irish people have been traveling to more exotic and far flung destinations, malaria is a disease that we need to be aware of. For this reason, I discuss malaria prevention, symptoms and treatment as well as destinations where precautions need to be taken in a separate article on [www.whelehans.ie](http://www.whelehans.ie).

### **The Irish Midge problem**

We are lucky in Ireland that we have no disease carrying insects. However, most Irish people will have encountered the irritation of midges. Midges generally come out in the evening during the summer months and you most commonly find swarms of them hovering in bogs, near trees and near water. They like warm, humid weather so this is when they are most prevalent. They don't like bright sunny days and a wind of more than 5km per hour will blow them away. For this reason, you do not tend to find them in coastal areas. Like mosquitoes, it is the female midge that bites in order to get blood to feed her young. Their bites don't hurt but will cause you to itch. The best way to keep them away from you is to use insect repellants. Insect repellent spray is a must for all farmers, golfers, walkers and outdoor enthusiasts.

**Disclaimer: Please ensure you consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended**

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans, log on to [www.whelehans.ie](http://www.whelehans.ie) or dial 04493 34591. You can also e-mail queries to [info@whelehans.ie](mailto:info@whelehans.ie).