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Deet Insect Repellant

Insect repellents containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide, also known as N,N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide) with a concentration of 10% appear to be as safe as products with a concentration of 30% when used according to the directions on the product labels. DEET is not recommended for use on children under 2 months of age.

DEET-containing products are the most effective mosquito repellents available. DEET also is effective as a repellent against a variety of other insects, including ticks. It should be used when there is a need to prevent insect-borne disease. The concentration of DEET in products may range from less than 10% to over 30%. The efficacy of DEET plateaus at a concentration of 30%, the maximum concentration currently recommended for infants and children. The major difference in the efficacy of products relates to their duration of action. Products with concentrations around 10% are effective for periods of approximately two hours. As the concentration of DEET increases, the duration of activity increases; for example, a concentration of about 24% has been shown to provide an average of 5 hours of protection.

The safety of DEET does not appear to relate to differences in these concentrations. A prudent approach would be to select the lowest concentration effective for the amount of time spent outdoors. It is generally agreed that DEET should not be applied more than once a day.

There are no specific data on the skin absorption of DEET as a function of age. However, data on skin absorption of similar substances suggest that absorption through the skin would not differ after an infant has reached a month or two of age.

DEET should not be used in a product that combines the repellent with a sunscreen. Sunscreens often are applied repeatedly because they can be washed off. DEET is not water-soluble and will last up to 8 hours. Repeated application may increase the potential toxic effects of DEET.

Other precautions

Apply DEET sparingly on exposed skin; do not use under clothing.

Do not use DEET on the hands of young children; avoid applying to areas around the eyes and mouth.

Do not use DEET over cuts, wounds or irritated skin. Wash treated skin with soap and water after returning indoors; wash treated clothing.

Avoid spraying in enclosed areas; do not use DEET near food.