

Mosquitoes and Black Flies

If we've been hiking long enough, there will be times when we have unwanted hiking partners, not the two legged variety but the biting insect kind. The basic biting insects that we have to contend with in Ontario are mosquitoes and black flies. Both are active by May and gradually become less of a problem as the summer goes on.



Mosquitoes breed in stagnate water and are the most active at dawn and dusk. Black flies breed in clear running water. As we have cleaned up our streams one result is an improved habitat for black fly breeding. They, like us, dislike dirty streams. Black flies remain active all day.

Mosquitoes and black flies are attracted to our body warmth and release of carbon dioxide, both pretty hard to turn off while we are hiking. There are a few strategies we can try such as wearing protective, lighter coloured clothing, and avoiding perfumed soaps and shampoos. Unfortunately, these have only limited success, so we should look at insect repellents.

Repellents

The most effective repellent is Deet. It comes in various strengths and the good news is that it works. It is a powerful chemical compound and should be treated with caution. Check the percentage and use a low strength, and apply it more often. Apply it to your clothing first and if that does not work apply it to your skin - sparingly.



When applying it to your face, put a little on your hand and then your face. As soon as it is no longer required wash it off with soap and water. A special caution is required with children. Their livers are not fully developed and therefore not as able to deal with toxins. Use a lower percentage of Deet and apply it to their protective clothing only. Keep it away from their hands, which could lead to their mouths. Another drawback of using Deet is that it is a solvent and can damage some fabrics, plastics and paint.

Citronella is an oily substance derived from Asian grasses and has few of the problems that Deet has however it is not as effective. It is worth a try though, so look for a formula with a fairly high percentage of citronella.

Ticks

Ticks are potentially a problem in the southern part of Ontario as they may carry (act as vectors) for the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. The deer tick that is the potential carrier is very small, no larger than the head of a pin. It can not fly and must wait on a plant for you to brush by. Protective clothing such as long pants tucked in to your socks and long sleeved shirts offer protection, Deet may also help. A close examination of your body at the end of the day is a good practice. Have a friend check your back and the back of your legs. There is a lot written about tick removal; however, if your Swiss Army knife has a small pair of tweezers, they will work just fine, just remove the tick(s) as soon as you can.



Deer Flies

Deer flies, those triangular shaped jobs, are very persistent and I do not know of a repellent that works. My Woods "Don't Bug Me Shirt" with its hood and fine mesh face covering is effective and is also good for black flies and mosquitoes. There are even lighter mesh shirts available and are easily carried and slipped on when needed.



If you are prepared for these unwanted hiking companions they need not spoil your outing. It is unfortunate that they usually become active as the spring flowers arrive, but I will be out enjoying them, the flowers that is.

For more information about some of these “bugs” check the following websites.

- *Biting Flies and Mosquitoes Attacking Man and Livestock in Canada* - Learn more about the life cycles and disease transmission risk of the bloodsucking insect species of Canada, such as mosquitoes, black flies, midges, horse flies and deer flies. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada - http://res2.agr.gc.ca/ecorc/diptera/cont_e.htm
- *The Lyme Disease Network* - <http://www.lymenet.org>
- Lyme Disease Fact Sheet, Public Health Agency of Canada - http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/id-mi/lyme-fs_e.html
- *Deer tick (Ixodes scapularis)* - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/Lymeinfo.htm>
- *Biting Flies: Black Flies (Simuliidae)*, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada - http://sci.agr.gc.ca/ecorc/diptera/bf11-dp11_e.htm
- Insect Repellents, Mosquito Control, Pest Management Regulatory Agency, Health Canada - <http://www.pmra-arla.gc.ca/english/consum/mosquito-e.html>

Happy hiking,
Greg



About Greg

Greg is an experienced and certified hike leader and instructor. He has been a long time member of the Bruce Trail Association (www.bruce-trail.org), the Grand Valley Trails Association (www.gvta.on.ca) and other hiking organizations. Greg has an extensive background in aviation and air traffic control. Greg has taught introduction to hiking courses and map and compass courses for several years. Currently his website, Greg Vincent's Hiking Site, resides at <http://home.golden.net/%7Egvincent/>

Other The Right Stuff articles are:

- “On the Up and Up” or Icy Walking
- Footwear - Boots & Socks (how to care for your feet & how to choose boots & socks)
- Clothing (how to keep warm & dry)
- Packs (what kind to carry & what to put in them)
- Trail Safety (how to ensure you hike without incident)
- Trekking Poles (modern ones - what are they & why use them)
- Winter Walking (all the peculiarities of hiking in cold climes)
- Medical Emergencies (how to prepare for & respond to a medical emergency while hiking)
- Warm Weather Walking (the scoop on hiking in warm weather)
- Snowshoeing (If you can walk, you can snowshoe – no ifs, ands or buts.)
- Global Positioning System or GPS (What is it and how it works.)