

Ordinarily, mosquitoes are little more than a mild irritant, but because they can transmit diseases such as West Nile encephalitis to humans and pets, people should take steps to avoid being bitten and eliminate mosquito-breeding areas.

During warm weather, mosquitoes can breed in any still water that stands for more than four days. The most effective way to control mosquitoes is to eliminate standing water. Homeowners should use IPM, or integrated pest management, tactics to protect themselves and their families. IPM aims to manage pests -- such as insects, diseases, weeds and animals -- by combining physical, biological and chemical tactics that are safe and environmentally compatible.

Homeowners should follow these IPM tips for mosquito prevention:

- Eliminate standing water by removing old tires, buckets, toys, and other unnecessary objects that catch water
- Drain excess water from flowerpots
- Empty accumulated water from trashcan lids, recycling bins, toys, plants and other water-catching objects
- Keep rain gutters and drains clean and free of obstructions
- Turn over wading pools and wheelbarrows when not in use
- Tightly cover rain barrels to prevent egg-laying
- Change water in birdbaths by flushing with a hose at least once a week
- Fill tree holes with sand or cement or drill holes to allow drainage
- Keep swimming pools covered when not in use
- Empty accumulated water from boats and cargo trailers
- Clear aquatic vegetation from around the edges of ponds to allow fish to feed on mosquito larvae and pupae
- Organize your community to clean up mosquito breeding areas. Neighborhood clean up days can be organized through civic or youth organizations. Homeowners can be encouraged to clean up their yards, and water-collecting containers can be picked up from vacant lots.

Bti, a naturally occurring bacteria, can be used to kill mosquito larvae in areas known to have standing water. Bti can be purchased in small, donut-shaped form, often called "mosquito dunks", which are useful in small areas of standing water, such as a birdbath or small puddle of water. Granular Bti is also available, and effective for larger areas, such as backyard ponds.

Mosquitoes should be excluded from buildings by keeping windows, doors and porches tightly screened. For mosquitoes inside the house, use a fly swatter. When outside, wear long-sleeved shirts and long trousers. Avoid peak mosquito feeding times, usually dusk to dawn.

When going outdoors for an extended period of time, insect repellents can provide protection from mosquito bites. Repellents can protect for up to five hours, but because people vary in their attractiveness to mosquitoes, the effectiveness of the repellent may depend on the individual. Repellents often contain pesticides and are poisonous. Before using a repellent or insecticide, be sure you thoroughly read and understand all directions and cautions on the product label, especially if you will be applying the product on a child, pregnant woman or the elderly.

The Pennsylvania IPM program is a collaboration between the Pennsylvania State University and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture aimed at promoting integrated pest management in both agricultural and nonagricultural situations. For more information, contact the program at (814) 865-2839, or visit Web site <http://www.paipm.org>.

Please Visit the Commonwealth of PA site for more information about the West Nile Virus at <http://www.westnile.state.pa.us>