



# PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

## Protect children from West Nile Virus this summer July 16, 2004

**Vancouver, B.C.** – Most parents are already accustomed to slathering their children with sun block. However, with West Nile Virus expected to appear in B.C. this summer, parents also need to protect children from mosquito bites. Although the threat of serious illness from the virus is low, treatments do not currently exist. Avoiding bites remains the best way to prevent contracting West Nile Virus.

“When they are busy with fun summer activities, children tend to be fairly oblivious to mosquitoes. Yet the threat of West Nile is real, and parents need to take precautions,” explains Dr. David Smith, Medical Director, General Pediatrics Clinic, BC Children’s Hospital.

Put insect repellent on children before they go outside, especially mid-summer during peak mosquito season. Mosquitoes are particularly active at dusk and dawn. Always supervise application on children and follow the directions on the label, avoiding face and hands. Apply sprays in a well ventilated area, away from food and drinks.

Other ways to protect children include wearing light-coloured clothing with pant legs, long sleeves, and a hat. Look around your property and remove sources of standing water that serve as mosquito breeding grounds, and ensure window and door screens are in good condition.

### **Insect repellents for children**

The use of insect repellent for children was recently examined by Health Canada and guidelines have been implemented to optimize both effectiveness and safety.

While a variety of products are available, including some with natural ingredients such as soy bean oil, lavender, and citronella, repellents containing the chemical DEET have been proven most effective.

Do not use products with DEET on babies less than six months old. Try to keep babies indoors at dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active, and use light-coloured protective clothing when outdoors.

For children six months to two years old, a repellent containing less than 10 per cent DEET may be applied once per day. For those aged two to 12, a repellent with less than 10 per cent DEET may be applied up to three times per day.

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For children over the age of 12, look for products containing 30 per cent or less DEET concentration. These should be reapplied no more than three times per day. While no immediate health threats have been identified from the use of DEET, concentrations above 30 per cent do not increase the level of protection and should be avoided.

Some products are billed as sunscreen/insect repellent combinations. Because sunscreen and insect repellent are applied in differing amounts, these blended sprays and lotions should be used as insect repellents only, and applied accordingly. Apply regular sunscreen as per the product directions.

For further information about West Nile Virus, visit the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control website at [www.bccdc.org](http://www.bccdc.org). More information about personal insect repellents is available from Health Canada at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca).

BC Children's Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, provides expert care for the province's most seriously ill or injured children, including newborns and adolescents. For more information please visit [www.cw.bc.ca](http://www.cw.bc.ca).

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information visit [www.phsa.ca](http://www.phsa.ca).

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