

Springtime Concerns for Your Health

(Brought to you from your Health & Fitness Committee)

TICKS KEEP ON TICKING

It's an unusual year for ticks. Emergency department (ED) visits for tick bites are running at roughly 114 per 100,000 people per week, nearly double the typical rate at this time in previous years (60-70 per 100,000). The Northeast is bearing the brunt of it, with the Midwest running a close second. It's not clear whether this is just an earlier year or a worse year overall. Time will tell.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Prevention goes a long way. Know where to expect ticks. Ticks live in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas, or even on animals. Spending time outside walking your dog, camping, gardening, or hunting could bring you in close contact with ticks. Many people get ticks in their own yard or neighborhood.

- Avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter. Walk in the center of trails.
- Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE), para-menthane-diol (PMD), or 2-undecanone.
 - If you are using sunscreen, apply sunscreen first and insect repellent second.

. Most pathogens can only be transmitted after a tick feeds for some time, so call your physician if one has been attached more than 36–48 hours. Use tweezers for removal, or a tick removal kit. And remember: the smallest ticks are the size of a poppy seed.

Check your dogs too after every walk. The most common areas on your pet are: around ears, tail, eyelids, under the collar, between the back legs, under the front legs, between the toes. Check for further information with your vet.

FEELING CRUMMY? IT'S LIKELY THE COMMON COLD AND/OR ALLERGIES

The ***common cold*** is approaching its spring peak while other respiratory viruses become dormant. If you're feeling crummy, it could be a cold. Or it

may not be a virus at all. Much of the U.S. is suffering from allergies, and allergy season is getting longer and more intense. Plants are releasing pollen about 40 days earlier than they used to and stopping about two weeks later, thanks to rising temperatures. The resulting higher CO2 levels mean more pollen per plant.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

1) Check the pollen forecast - You can find air quality reports daily on our Laurelmead info website in the Health & Fitness section. Also, the Weather Channel app gives daily ratings for “allergies”, “breathing”, cold & flu”, “skin health” and for several outdoor activities.

2) Rinse your nose with saline (use distilled water), and shower before bed to wash pollen off. For medication, go with second-generation antihistamines like Zyrtec over Benadryl (Benadryl has been around since the 1940s but carries more side effects.) Always check with your doctor.

DO I REALLY NEED A SPRING COVID SHOT?

It's complicated, but yes. Current CDC guidance recommends two updated doses per year for people over 65: one in fall, one in spring. A recent CDC study (blocked from publication by political appointees, but valid) found that the winter vaccine continues to provide 55% additional protection against severe disease and death. Last year, around 40,000 people still died from Covid-19. That said, robust data comparing one versus two annual doses are genuinely scarce. What we do know: summer Covid waves have occurred for six straight years, and recent summer waves have been larger than winter ones. If that pattern holds, June or July is when things pick up, making late May the sweet spot for vaccination.

Age matters, too. Older immune systems have a harder time holding onto immunological memory, which is why the guidance skews toward more frequent boosting for seniors.

*This information is condensed from: Epidemiologist Dr. Katelyn Jetelina, MPH, PhD, and from the CDC