

Do Mosquitos Like You?

Have you ever noticed that mosquitoes seem to be attracted to some people more than others? Some people can come in from a night outdoors covered with bites while others might be unbiten. But how could that be?



Scientists say that their latest experiments suggest that what attracts mosquitoes to many people might be *less* important than what repels mosquitoes. “The repellents are what make the difference,” says Dr. James Logan, who is interested in the study of how animals communicate using smell. Mosquitoes are attracted to all people, but only some people’s bodies give off chemicals that repel mosquitoes.

Dr. Logan and his team of scientists have found seven or eight body chemicals that seem to repel mosquitoes. Those repellent odors cannot be smelled by humans, but they are strong enough to keep mosquitoes away.

Scientists will use the information they have learned to make new mosquito repellents that smell like two of the most powerful repellent odors they found. They hope to sell the new repellents in stores within a year or two.

NEWS WORD BOX

attract repellent
chemical odor
powerful natural

MORE FACTS BEHIND THE NEWS

- The human body can give off 300 to 400 different chemical odors. It is pretty amazing that mosquitoes can sort through all those smells to find just the right person to bite. That is even more amazing when you add to all those human smells the “soup” of chemicals that are found in Earth’s air!
- Creating a new repellent is not as easy as it might sound. Odors that repel usually evaporate into the air very quickly. It will be difficult to develop a repellent chemical that will stay on the skin rather than evaporate.
- Many of the most effective repellents sold today contain a chemical called DEET -- but DEET can be unsafe when large amounts are used. That’s why Dr. Logan and his team of scientists hope to find a “natural” repellent to keep mosquitoes away.

THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

What are some other “pests” found in nature?
How do people try to keep those pests away?