



Holidays in some regions abroad can be a misery for some, especially Britons with very pale skins, who appear for breakfast on the first day of their holiday with the highly visible red swellings associated with bites by mosquitoes. But there is no evidence of vulnerability due only to skin tone.

It is female mosquitoes which bite people and animals to get a blood meal. They puncture the skin with piercing mouth parts to feed – causing at least localized itching and irritation. It is recognised that most female mosquitoes cannot produce eggs without a blood meal – male mosquitoes do not bite people and animals

Mosquitoes are attracted to warm bodies and the carbon dioxide released by humans which is higher during or after exercise. But also from those who are pregnant, from body odour including sweat and fragrances, dark coloured clothing, maybe from specific blood types but that is yet to be proven, from larger people with higher metabolic rates. It may be useful to know that they are repelled by citronella, eucalyptus, lavender, peppermint and garlic. Also by rosemary, catnip, citrus scents like lemon balm.

They get a “bad press” but, like all creatures, they have their place in ecology. They are part of the “food chain”, they make some contribution to pollination of plant species - by feeding on nectar and plant juices they “inadvertently” transfer pollen. Their larvae are a food source for aquatic animals – fish, amphibians & other aquatic invertebrates. Adult mosquitoes are consumed by a wide range of predators including bats, birds, reptiles and other insects.



It is possible to build some degree of sensitivity to the saliva from mosquito bites although not a complete elimination of reactions. Repeated exposure to the same species can lead to a natural desensitization meaning milder or no reactions. Children can have a more intense reaction than adults. Some people have an allergy to them so reactions may be more severe.

For some they may not be not much more than an annoyance but, for others, medical assistance may be required. But in some parts of the world they are well known for transmitting potentially and actually fatal diseases such as malaria, dengue, yellow fever which are of a scale which makes them limiters of human population – estimated one million per year or 50 to 60 billion throughout history or about half of all humans that have ever lived. They are the worlds deadliest animal to humans - in biting to draw blood as food, their saliva transmits deadly diseases. And its not just humans, there is eastern equine encephalomyelitis (EEE) causing a high mortality rate in horses, those that survive may have acquired permanent nervous system damage.

Other animals which sting rather than bite are bees, wasps or hornets and rarely ants. They have a stinger body part which injects venom as a defence mechanism which causes pain, swelling and in some cases allergic reaction or the transmission of disease but is rarely toxic. Less frequently venomous spider bites are associated with morbidity and mortality.

It is prejudice but I like bees, I like the honey they produce, I understand the remarkable job they do in pollination to the benefit of agriculture and they have never done me any harm.

But I find I am unable to like mosquitoes.

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