



Talking Points for Vectorborne Diseases

Talking points and message maps for local health professionals

If you are approached by the media about vectorborne disease in your jurisdiction, the following talking points may be helpful.

1. Blacklegged ticks (also known as deer ticks) can carry bacteria that cause Lyme disease and other diseases.
2. Use an insect repellent approved by the Environmental Protection Agency and follow label instructions.
3. Wear light-colored, protective clothing to better see ticks or mosquitoes.
4. Check yourself for ticks after walking in high grass, heavily wooded areas, and bushy areas with leaf litter.
5. If you find a tick embedded in your skin, remove it immediately to preventing infection by grasping the head with tweezers.
6. Prevent mosquito breeding by draining standing water from gutters, wading pools, and old tires.

Some additional talking points to include, if applicable:

7. If you are having symptoms or illness that you think is from an insect bite, contact your doctor [insert correct resource] right away.
8. For more information about ticks and mosquitoes, contact your local health department or visit the Wisconsin Department of Health Services web page on ticks at dhs.wisconsin.gov/tickborne or mosquitoes at dhs.wisconsin.gov/arboviral.

MESSAGE MAPS

Message mapping is one of the most important risk communication tools that public health agencies can employ. The goal of a message map is to convey important information in a concise and easy to understand fashion.



General Guidelines for Completing a Message Map

- Stick to three key messages or one key message with three parts for each underlying concern or specific question.
- Keep key messages brief. The reader should ideally spend less than 10 seconds per line.
- Develop messages that are easily understood by the target audience. (For communications with the general public, use a 6th to 8th grade readability level.)
- Place messages within a message set. The most important messages should occupy the first and last positions.
- Develop key messages that cite credible third parties.
- Use graphics and other visual aids to enhance key messages.
- Keep a positive tone. Messages should be solution-oriented and constructive. Try to balance negative messages with positive ones.
- Avoid unnecessary use of “absolute” words, such as no, not, never, nothing, and none.⁵

The following is a message map that could be used when addressing the general public regarding ticks and mosquitoes.

Key Messages <i>Three key messages</i>	Supporting Information <i>Three pieces of supporting information for each key message</i>
Message 1 Be quick and remove that tick.	Supporting Info 1 Ticks often found in Wisconsin are the deer tick and the wood tick, which are most active during warm-weather months. Supporting Info 2 The blacklegged (deer) tick must be attached for 12-24 hours before bacteria can be transmitted. Supporting Info 3 If you find a tick burrowed into your skin, remove it immediately with tweezers and be sure the head remains intact.
Message 2 Reduce exposure to mosquitoes.	Supporting Info 1 Mosquito-borne diseases are rare in Wisconsin, but people should still take steps to prevent being infected. Supporting Info 2 Use insect repellents and avoid being outside at times of high mosquito activity (dawn and dusk). Supporting Info 3 Wear light-colored, loose clothing when doing activities outdoors in dense mosquito areas.
Message 3 Keep ticks and mosquitoes away.	Supporting Info 1 Avoid areas with high grass and heavily leafy areas where ticks and mosquitoes commonly live. Supporting Info 2 Drain areas with standing water to eliminate mosquito breeding. Supporting Info 3 If in areas with high tick and mosquito activity, wear protective clothing and use repellents with DEET or permethrin (follow product instructions).

