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WELLNESS

## In the News

Catch up on the latest **wellness-related developments** from the past month.

### Tick Bites Are on the Rise

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2025 has seen the highest rate of tick bites in more than five years. The CDC reports 74 tick bites per 100,000 emergency room visits in the United States in July, the highest rate for this month since 2017. The two most common regions for tick bites are the Midwest and Southeast; however, experts say tick habitats have been gradually expanding throughout the United States. Experts say climate change could be a significant factor in the increase and spread of ticks and tick-borne illnesses. Many regions have had warmer weather and shorter, less severe winters that have given ticks the opportunity to have extended periods of activity.

The most common tick-borne disease is Lyme disease. The CDC estimates that about 476,000 people in the United States are diagnosed and treated for Lyme disease each year. Lyme disease is caused by bacteria carried by black-legged ticks, commonly known as deer ticks. The ticks develop the bacteria after feeding on infected animals and then transmitting the bacteria by biting people. Lyme disease can develop in humans shortly after a bite or years later. The most common symptoms of Lyme disease are chills, fever, bull's-eye rash at the bite site, enlarged lymph nodes, sore throat, vision changes, fatigue, and muscle aches or headaches. If left

untreated, Lyme disease can affect the circulatory or central nervous system and cause joint damage.

To prevent tick bites, people are encouraged to take precautions when spending any time outdoors, especially near grassy, bushy or wooded areas. These prevention techniques include wearing pants and long-sleeved shirts, spraying the outside of your clothes with permethrin, a synthetic insecticide, and staying on clear paths when possible. Inspecting yourself, your pets and others once you are indoors is important.

If you spot a tick, be careful removing it. Use tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible without squeezing the tick's body. Slowly, yet firmly, pull the tick directly outward. Remove the tick, then clean the bite area thoroughly with a disinfectant and monitor the area for any symptoms. Dispose of it by flushing it down the toilet, putting it in alcohol or putting it in a sealed container wrapped in tape. It's essential not to crush the tick with your fingers because it can increase the risk of disease transmission.

Contact a health care professional if you develop a rash or fever within weeks of removing the tick.

## Health Experts Warn About the Misuse of Diphenhydramine

Allergy experts are noticing a dangerous misuse of the allergy medication diphenhydramine, best known by the brand name Benadryl. Taking diphenhydramine after a food allergy reaction can be risky because its sedative effects may make it harder to notice if symptoms are getting worse. A growing number of health experts now recommend that epinephrine be the go-to treatment for food allergies.

Diphenhydramine was approved in 1946 and has been used to treat allergies, aid sleep, and reduce cold symptoms. According to the American Pharmacists Association, use of this drug typically rises over the summer with people using it to treat itchiness from bug bites or poison ivy, as well as symptoms of grass and pollen allergies.

Although people commonly use diphenhydramine, many don't realize it can cause sedation, cognitive impairment, and, in rare cases, dangerous cardiac effects. In adults, the drug can remain in the body for up to 18 hours, causing sleepiness, disorientation and an increased risk of falling. Diphenhydramine can be particularly dangerous for children, even when using pediatric formulations. Although this medication is available over the counter, health experts warn that it should always be used under the guidance of a medical professional.

Contact your health care provider to understand the benefits and risk factors for taking diphenhydramine, and to discuss alternative options.

## Illinois Becomes First State to Require Student Mental Health Screenings

Students in Illinois will soon be required to have a mental health screening alongside annual vision and hearing exams. Governor JB Pritzker signed a bill in July requiring Illinois public school students in grades 3 through 12 to undergo annual mental health screenings. The bill will go into effect for the 2027-28 school year. The Illinois State Board of Education has until Sept. 1, 2026, to provide schools with guidance and policies to implement the newly mandated mental health screenings.

According to the CDC, anxiety and depression are some of the most common mental health conditions diagnosed in children between the ages of 3 and 17, with mental health being a significant concern among teens. The United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends screenings for anxiety in children ages 8 to 18 years and for depression in adolescents ages 12 to 18. Mental health screenings can be essential for identifying mental health conditions early, offering quicker access to support and treatment, improving academic and social outcomes, and supporting families. Annual screenings aim to reduce the stigma that still surrounds mental health. Although this new bill will only affect students in Illinois, it's essential to keep an eye on emerging trends, as other states may follow suit in the coming years.

Contact your health care provider for further guidance on mental health screenings for your family.

Stay tuned for more wellness-related news and developments.