Avoiding Black Flies

Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) received an uptick in the number of calls pertaining to biting flies, likely black flies, and is urging people to reduce their chances of being bitten.

Take these simple steps:

- Avoid areas where black flies are active during the day, especially at dusk and dawn.

- Wear light-colored long pants and long sleeves, especially whites and tans. Also wear a light colored hat.

- Consider using insect repellant to reduce your chance of being bitten.

- If you are bitten, clean the bite and apply topical products to reduce itching. Avoid scratching to reduce chances of infection.

What Are Black Flies?

Black flies are small, biting flies that are a nuisance to people and animals living, working, or playing near running rivers and streams. Black flies are sensitive to weather conditions. They are most active on cloudy, humid days with low wind.

These flies are typically dark in color and some species are also referred to as 'punkies' or 'no-see-um's'. On people, they crawl into sleeves, under neckbands, around boot tops and other vulnerable places, especially favoring the head just beneath the rim of a hat. Bites can cause swelling and numb soreness for many days.

The painfully itchy bite of the black fly is created when it cuts a hole in the skin to suck blood from animals and people. The flies attack around the eyes, ears, scalp and occasionally on the arms and exposed legs. The pain and swelling of the bite are due to the body's allergic response to the fly's saliva that they inject when feeding. Fortunately, black flies do not transmit any diseases to humans in Washington state, but can cause discomfort and irritation.

Again, although black flies are a nuisance, they do not transmit disease, and therefore are not considered a public health risk. More information can be found at www.srhd.org. SRHD's website offers comprehensive, updated information about Spokane Regional Health District and its triumphs in making Spokane a safer and healthier community.