

Chiggers Got You Itching?

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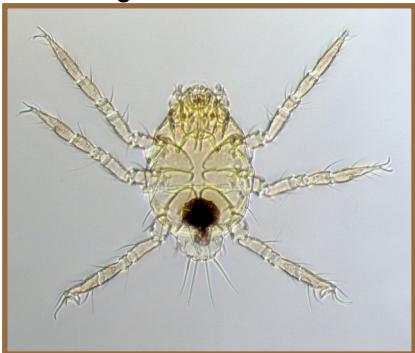


Fast Facts

- Chigger season in Nebraska is June and July, but bites can occur until first frost.
- They do NOT burrow into your skin or live inside your body.
- Chiggers do not suck blood. They create a stylostome, which is a hardened tube that forms by the digestive enzymes secreted in the saliva.
- Duration of the itch is directly proportional to the amount of time the chigger remained attached, so get them off ASAP!

Life Cycle

Chiggers are the immature stage of the common red harvest mite. At this larval stage, they have six legs and are nearly invisible to the naked eye. They congregate outdoors on patches of soil and vegetation, waiting for a human or animal host to come by. Chiggers use their mouthparts to inject digestive enzymes that breakdown skin cells, which they eat. This is the only stage where they are parasitic to humans. After feeding, they drop off the host and molt into a nymph and eventually an adult. Both the nymphs and adult mites have eight legs and feed on small insects. Adult females lay eggs on a vegetation and begin the life cycle again before over-wintering as an adult.



Chigger is immature mite.

To Avoid Bites:

- Wear loose-fitting clothing
- Avoid sitting or lying on the ground
- Apply DEET repellent to shoes, socks and pant legs.
- Wear clothes impregnated with permethrin-based insecticide.
- Take a hot shower after returning indoors to dislodge mites.



Common red harvester mite.

Bites

Chiggers locate hosts by detecting carbon dioxide and climbing to higher places to increase chances of attaching to clothing. They can travel from shoe to waist in 15 minutes, focusing feeding sites where clothing is tight and body temperatures are high (sock lines, waistbands, underwear, and behind the knees). A chigger mite can remain attached for 3-5 days if they left undisturbed. Chiggers cause no diseases, but are associated with great discomfort due to allergic reaction to the salivary fluid they use to digest skin cells. Reactions are delayed and characterized by intense itching, great discomfort, small red bumps and blisters. Itching can result in secondary infections and inflammation which worsens the condition. The reaction typically occurs for 3-4 days and takes up to 3 weeks for bumps to heal. Over-the-counter medications such as calamine lotion, hydrocortisone ointment and other anti-itch solutions can calm the itch and help avoid scratching the bites.

Management

Because they are practically invisible, it is impossible to detect the exact locations of high populations and avoid them. It is recommended to keep lawns cut short and shrubbery well-manicured. Biting will not occur if temperatures are less than 60°F, so prepare in advance for the chigger season. Insecticide sprays with bifenthrin as the active ingredient, may reduce 75-95% of chiggers for several weeks. Look for chiggers on the label and follow the directions for outdoor