

Chiggers: Itching in all the Wrong Places

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With summer comes spending more time outdoors, and more time outdoors inevitably leads to more exposure to things that can make us itch – plants, mosquitos and chiggers to name a few. But what exactly is a chigger? Chances are, you've never actually seen one. Instead, you've probably discovered hours after spending some time outdoors you're now covered in some uncomfortable and unbearably-itchy bites.

What Exactly is a Chigger?

Chiggers are immature or larval red harvest mites and are the only life stage of the mite that bites and feeds on people and animals alike. Larvae have six legs and can measure up to 1/100 of an inch in diameter, making them incredibly difficult to see with the naked eye. Adults are more recognizable due to their larger size and bright red color and feed on small insects and insect eggs. Females lay eggs on vegetation throughout the summer and overwinter as adults.

Bites

In Nebraska, chiggers are most active in June and July, but can persist throughout the summer. People can become exposed to chiggers nearly anywhere outdoors, whether it be strolling through tall grass in a park, gardening or simply enjoying some time in their yards. Chiggers locate their hosts by detecting

carbon dioxide and climbing to higher places to attach themselves to the clothing or fur of their victims. They particularly prefer tight or constricted areas like waistlines, ankles, armpits and other areas of snug-fitted clothing.

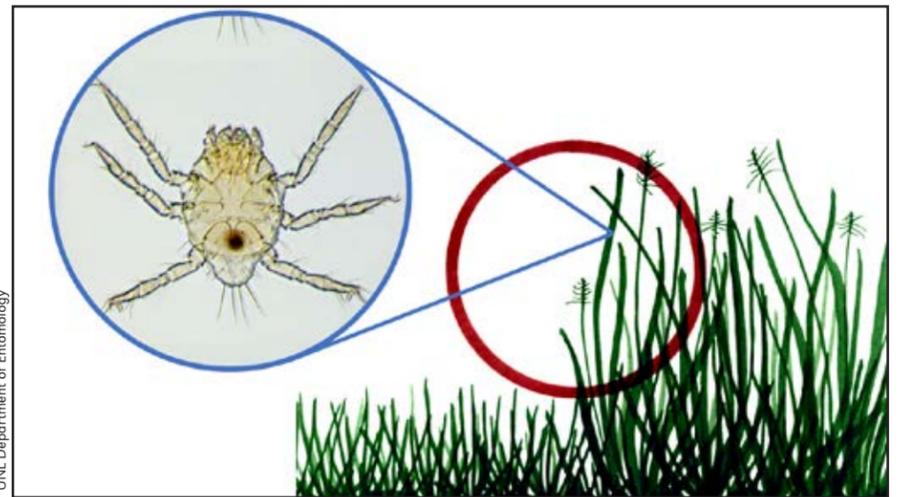
Chiggers do not borrow into the skin. Instead, they crawl into the hair follicle



Adult chigger or the common red harvest mite.

and inject a salivary fluid to dissolve nearby cells – this is what makes their bites so itchy. Within a few hours, small, red welts begin to appear where the chigger bit. Itching tends to peak after 1-2 days of the initial bite, and sometimes persists for up to a week. Chiggers can remain on their hosts for 3-5 days unless removed. These mites are not known to transmit any diseases, however secondary infections may occur as a result of scratching.

If you are bitten by chiggers, over-the-counter treatments such as calamine lotion, hydrocortisone ointment or other non-prescription local anesthetics can reduce the itch.



Where are they? Chiggers (blue) are tiny and are rarely ever seen with the naked eye but lurk in grassy habitats (red). Because they're nearly impossible to avoid, it's important to take measures to protect yourself from their bites.

Prevention and Management

As mentioned, because chiggers are impossible to spot, protection and avoidance is key. To protect yourself from chiggers and their bites, you should:

- Wear loose-fitting and protective clothing when possible.
- Avoid sitting or reclining on the ground while outdoors.
- Apply a repellent, such as DEET or a permethrin clothing spray. Many plant-based or natural repellents have not been tested for effectiveness against chiggers.
- After returning from a chigger-infested area, shower or bathe with hot water as soon as possible. Scrubbing your skin thoroughly dislodges any mites and

prevents future bites.

- Remove and launder your clothing before re-wearing.
- Keep landscapes and lawns well-manicured.

Areas infested with chiggers can be treated with insecticides containing bifenthrin. Before applying any insecticide, you should always read and follow the label instructions and precautions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact your physician for severe cases of chigger dermatitis or hypersensitivity to bites.

For local pest diagnostic services, including identification and control recommendations, please contact the Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County office.

Collect – Share – Practice: Family Emergency Communication Plans

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The time to prepare is before something happens. No matter where you are, work, school or home, a Family Emergency Communication Plan is essential in the event of any crisis! Every member of your household should know how to reach each other or a designated contact in the event of emergency and have a meeting place if you are separated.

There are three steps to creating a Family Emergency Communication Plan:

1. **COLLECT.** Collect the information for family members and important contacts like your physician, veterinarian, school, child care providers and more. Have a paper copy of this information and update it regularly.
2. **SHARE.** Make sure every member of your family has a copy of the Family Emergency Communication Plan. Go to <https://www.ready.gov/> plan and fill out the Family Emergency Communication Plan Checklist. Once the plan is complete, you can print it and post it on the refrigerator or a family bulletin board in your home. **TIP:** A wallet-sized, fill-in-the-blank version of the Family Emergency Communication Plan can be found at <https://go.unl.edu/familycommplan-wallet>
3. **PRACTICE.** Hold regular family meetings to review the Family Emergency Communication Plan and practice how you will get in touch with

one another in an emergency. Even the youngest members of the family can participate in these important practice exercises.

Choose a Primary Contact

Every family member should know who to contact if there is an emergency. Choose one person for all family members to contact. This person should live in a different town as they may be easier to reach if your community is involved in an emergency situation.

Pick a Meeting Place

Where will you meet up with your family if you have to get out of your house quickly? Your meeting place could be the big tree in the front yard or a neighbor's house.

Where will you meet if your neighborhood is being evacuated and you're not at home? Consider a place everyone in the family knows like the local library, fire station or church.

If you have family pets and need to leave your home, where can you go with them? Make plans before an emergency happens and practice, practice, practice.

Making Phone Calls in an Emergency

If you make a phone call to emer-

gency personnel, follow their directions carefully, you may be asked to stay on the phone. If you must redial a number, wait 10 seconds. Dialing too soon bogs down networks.

If there is an active emergency in your area, avoid using your phone for casual conversations. Do your part to keep networks free for first responders and emergency communications.

Your Mobile Phone Can be an Important Asset in an Emergency

Text, don't talk: If you are using a mobile phone, a text message may get through when a phone call will not. This is because a text message requires far less bandwidth than a phone call. Text messages may also save and then send automatically as soon as capacity becomes available. If driving, do not text, read texts or make a call without a hands-free

device. (We all know this doesn't just apply to "an emergency.")

If you must make a phone call from a mobile phone during an emergency, keep the call brief and share vital information with your family/plan members. Practice making brief calls and sharing important information.

Save Your Battery!

If you know there is severe weather approaching, make sure your mobile devices are fully charged. In an emergency, you can also conserve batteries by:

- Reducing the brightness of your display screen.
- Placing your mobile phone in airplane mode.
- Close any apps you don't need.

Mobile devices can be charged with portable power banks or power packs, solar battery chargers and car chargers. **TIP:** add a portable charger to your emergency preparedness kit.

Evacuation. If you must evacuate in an emergency and have a call-forwarding feature on your home or business landline, forward calls to your mobile number. Make sure you bring your portable charging devices with you.

Helpful resources:

Ready.gov – FEMA: Family Emergency Communication Plan - <https://www.ready.gov/plan>
Ready.gov – FEMA: Family Emergency Communication Plan – Wallet Size: <https://go.unl.edu/familycommplan-wallet>
American Red Cross Emergency Contact Card - <https://go.unl.edu/red-cross-card>
Nebraska Extension Disaster Education Resources - <https://disaster.unl.edu/>

