

# Preventing Chigger Bites

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The last few years, we have had significant numbers of phone calls from people who are getting chigger bites when gardening or spending time in their backyard. In Nebraska, chiggers are most active in June and July. Bites seem to peak around the 4th of July when people spend time outdoors, camping, picnicking, and watching fireworks displays.

## What are Chiggers?

Chiggers, also known as “redbugs or jiggers,” are the immature stages of the common red harvest mite. It is only the first (larval) stage of the mite that feeds on people and other passing animals.

Chigger mites attach themselves to the clothing of people or the fur of passing animals. They prefer constricted locations like sock tops, or waist bands. They do not burrow into the skin or suck blood as many people believe. Instead they crawl into a hair follicle, inject a salivary fluid which dissolves the hosts cells, then suck up the liquefied tissues. Within a few hours after feeding begins, small, reddish, intensely-itching welts begin to appear.



Chigger bites

## What Can You Do?

These suggestions offer some protection from chiggers:

- Stay out of areas where chiggers are likely to be present including woodlots, pastures, roadside ditches, or other areas with tall grasses and weeds. Chiggers are especially common in moist low-lying areas.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing and avoid sitting or reclining on the ground when camping, picnicking, or working outdoors.
- Apply a repellent to shoes, socks, and trousers before entering chigger-infested areas.
- As soon as possible after returning from a chiggers-infested area, take a

hot shower using plenty of soap and water. This will kill or dislodge many of the chiggers.

- Launder clothing prior to re-wearing.

When bites begin to itch, one course of treatment is to apply rubbing alcohol, followed by one of the non-prescription local anesthetics. A baking soda paste, calamine lotion, or product such as “After-Bite” also will help reduce discomfort. Avoid scratching bites since this increases irritation and may lead to secondary infection of the bite.

Where chiggers are a problem in landscapes, keep lawns and shrubbery well manicured, especially in areas adjacent to dwellings.

Chiggers can also be reduced by treating turf with insecticidal sprays. UNL Extension Entomologist Fred Baxendale found a liquid treatment of bifenthrin will reduce chiggers 75–95 percent for several weeks. Use 0.2 pounds active ingredient per acre. To escape the highest chigger populations, your first treatment should be early- to mid-June.

*Source: Fred Baxendale, UNL extension entomologist.*

**Know how. Know now.**