



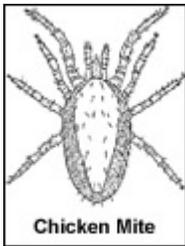
Mites



“Mite” is a term commonly used to refer to a group of insect-like organisms, some of which bite or cause irritation to people. Mites are very tiny, flattened parasitic arthropods in the order *Acari*.

Most mites never come into contact with humans, but some that do can affect a person’s health. While mites rarely transmit disease to humans, they definitely impact health in ways that range from simply being a nuisance when they enter homes in large numbers to inflicting severe skin irritation causing intense itching.

The most commonly encountered mites, including those that can adversely affect human health, are:



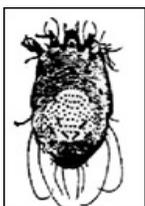
Bird Mites: Mites that normally infest birds also bite people. The northern fowl mite and chicken mite primarily infest chickens, but also pigeons, starlings and sparrows. The northern fowl mite cannot survive for more than a month off its host, while the chicken mite hides in cracks and crevices near bird nests during the day and feeds by night. Bird mites become a problem in spring and early summer when mite populations are high and when young birds leave their nests. The mites wander away from these nests in search of another host and may be found in homes clinging to walls, ceilings and bedding.



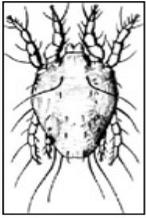
Rat Mites: Three types of rodent mites readily bite humans: the house mouse mite, spiny rat mite and tropical rat mite. The house mouse mite prefers to suck the blood of mice, but also will bite rats and people, often causing a rash around the bite. They prefer warm places (e.g., around pipes and furnaces) where rodents live. The spiny rat mite feeds on rats at night and hides by day in cracks and crevices around rat nests and resting places. The tropical rat mite’s bite is painful and causes skin irritation and itching.



Chiggers: It is the six-legged larval stage that typically feeds on rodents or ground dwelling birds but will bite people when they are available. Chigger larvae are red to yellow in color and appear as barely visible specks. When they detect the carbon dioxide exhaled by an animal, they climb on soil or vegetation and wave their front legs to make contact. They then grasp the host with their mouthparts. They do not suck blood but cut into the skin, inject skin-digesting saliva and suck up the liquefied skin. If not dislodged, the chigger will feed for several days. The bite becomes inflamed, hardens and itches. Chiggers spend most of their lives in cracks in the soil. They are typically found in rural, less disturbed areas, but can persist for years on soil in new subdivisions.



Scabies Mite: Scabies or “mange” mites infest mammals, including man. Most human infestations result from person-to-person contact. In dogs, scabies mites cause mange. Unlike other mites, scabies mites actually burrow up to 3cm into the skin to lay eggs. The mites are believed to feed on skin and secretions. The entire life cycle (10-17 days for human-infesting scabies mites) is spent on their host. Without a host, they survive only a few days. In previously unexposed individuals, a scabies infestation may go unnoticed for more than a month. Then, severe irritation and itching develops, especially at night. Scabies is a condition that must be treated by a physician.



House Dust Mites: Virtually invisible to the naked eye, house dust mites are nevertheless real. It has been shown that, like cockroaches, dust mites and their feces can become airborne and are one of the most common indoor allergens. That is, most persons diagnosed as being allergic to “house dust” are actually allergic to the dust mites whose bodies and feces are major components of dust. Although they may “hitchhike” on clothing, dust mites do not live on people. They feed primarily on dander, flakes of dead skin that fall from people and animals. Upholstered furniture, pillows and mattresses typically harbor more dust mites than carpeting.

MANAGING MITES

The first step in managing mites is proper identification. Mites are so small that some can only be seen with magnification. This makes inspection and identification extremely difficult. Likewise, mites that affect humans are a diverse group, each with very different habits, all of which investigators should be aware.

Seek medical attention when exposure to mites is suspected as the cause of skin irritation. This is certainly true in the case of scabies infestations that will require medication. In addition, bedding and clothing of scabies-infected persons should be washed regularly.

When mites have been identified, appropriate control measures can be employed. A vacuum sweeper can be a valuable weapon in the mite control arsenal. Infestations in and around structures can sometimes be eliminated by vacuuming alone. A high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter can be installed to help prevent airborne allergens, including dust mite particles.

A licensed Pest Management company will be able to assist in identification and control of mites and is highly recommended.

WHAT IF NO MITES ARE FOUND?

Other possibilities that have been identified to cause itching sensations and skin irritation include the following:

- 1) Dry air and static buildup, which causes hair on your skin to move.
- 2) Dust particles and other tiny material in the air.
- 3) Reactions to cosmetics or soaps, particularly *new* products.
- 4) Allergic reactions to other, non-biological materials
- 5) Dietary deficiencies



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