

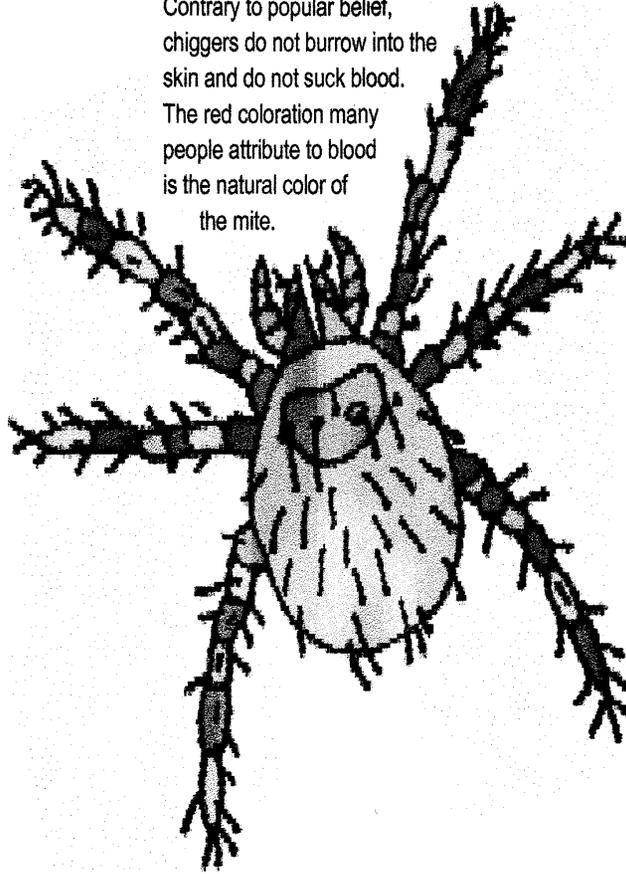
PREVENTION

Avoiding areas where chiggers live is the best way to prevent chigger bites. If you need to be outside in areas where chiggers are prominent, use repellents that contain permethrin or DEET to reduce chigger bites.

Although chiggers can penetrate many types of clothing, wearing boots, long pants and long sleeves can help. Wearing clothes that are made from tightly woven fabrics also helps. Tuck pant cuffs into socks or boots and tuck shirttail into pants to keep chiggers away from the skin.

As soon as possible after exposure to chiggers, take a bath in hot soapy water to remove them and wash clothes in hot soapy water to kill remaining mites. Even rinsing your exposed skin with water will help knock off any chiggers that have not yet settled in to feed. Around your home, mowing tall grass and weeds can reduce chigger habitat. If infestations are particularly heavy, spraying areas where chiggers live may reduce the problem. If you choose to use a pesticide remember to follow label instructions carefully.

Contrary to popular belief, chiggers do not burrow into the skin and do not suck blood. The red coloration many people attribute to blood is the natural color of the mite.



rev July 2011

CHIGGERS



SOME FACTS



**North Carolina Mosquito &
Vector Control Association**



Chiggers (also called harvest mites or red bugs) are mites, not insects. They are closely related to spiders and ticks.

Like most mites, chiggers are extremely small and are just barely visible to the naked eye. They occur mostly on wild animals, but can be a nuisance to people. Here are some facts about chiggers.

CHIGGER BIOLOGY

Chiggers are very small mites that are usually a yellowish to bright red color. They have four life stages —egg, larva, nymph and adult.

Adult chiggers lay eggs in the spring. The 6-legged larva hatches from the egg. Only the larval stage bites animals or people. The larva then changes into the nymph, which soon becomes an adult. Nymphs and adults are 8-legged. They feed on small insects or insect eggs and do not bite.

In North Carolina, chiggers may live year-round but are especially active during spring and summer. Chiggers live on leaves, shrubs and in wooded areas, pastures, pine straw and tall grass and weeds.

The parasitic larvae can be found feeding on wild mammals, birds, reptiles, and domestic animals. After hatching, the larvae climb vegetation and seek out hosts. After finding a host, the larvae attach to the skin and begin feeding. They inject a fluid that breaks down skin cells. Then they feed on the liquefied skin by sucking up the fluid. After feeding from a few hours to a few days, the chiggers eventually fall off the host.

When chiggers bite people, they usually attack areas of the body where the skin is thin and/or wrinkled. This includes the ankles and wrists, the waistline, the crease of the elbow, groin, armpits and the back of knees.

Chigger bites become annoying after several hours. The skin may appear red and develop intense itching at the site of the bite. In some cases, welts, swelling and dermatitis can also develop and last

for several days. Scratching can cause secondary infection. Although their bites can be severely annoying, chiggers in this country do not transmit any diseases.

Treatments to ease itching include ointments like calamine lotion, hydrocortisone, benzocaine or other medications recommended by your doctor or pharmacist. You can reduce the chance of secondary infection and ease the itching by not scratching.



Adult chiggers can be seen without magnification, but do not bite people or animals.