



CHIGGERS BEST PRACTICES

Chiggers are mites and technically not insects. Chiggers are microscopic, about 1/50 to 1/100th of an inch across. They are blood red in color. However, a well-fed chigger may be more of a yellow-red color. Adult chiggers are vegetarians. It is only the larval stage or juvenile stage that bites. Workers who stumble into a nest of chiggers may have hundreds of mites on their clothes looking for a meal.

Chiggers are primarily a South Jersey insect. Historically they have been found south of Interstate 195. However, recent reports have identified chiggers in Middlesex County and even further north. Chiggers constantly rove the ground seeking birds or reptiles, their primary food source. Humans are often an afterthought. Chiggers like temperatures between 77° F and 86° F. They'll just sit there when temperatures are below 60°, and they'll die in the lower 40's. Surprisingly, they don't like temperatures above 100° F. Chiggers like high humidity, tall grass, vegetation, and wooded areas create an environment that's ideal for the creatures.



If you are in a chigger-infested area, wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, heavy socks, leather shoes, and gloves. Tuck your pants into your socks. Chiggers will climb over clothing to reach a spot where they can attach. Because they are constantly moving, chiggers can cover your body quickly, looking for a piece of bare skin to settle into. They can be choosy, spending hours looking for the ideal spot.



Chiggers do not burrow under the skin. They insert their mouth parts into our skin pores, around hair follicles, or folds in the skin. They are seldom able to pierce thick skin, so you'll likely find chigger bites at the ankles, the back of the knees, around the crotch, under the beltline, and the arms. The piercing doesn't hurt, and most of us don't feel it. But when the creature's saliva reacts with our cells, it causes pin-sized red welts and itching that can last for days.

Chiggers can remain on a body for three to four days, trying to finish their meal. In most cases, that doesn't occur because of bathing or scratching the creatures off.

If you do knock the chigger off, that's the end of the creature. It cannot bite someone again and will die.

Dr. Phil Nixon, a University of Illinois entomologist, suggests using insect repellents with DEET to prevent exposure. Spray your exposed skin and the areas around your waistbands, cuffs, shoe tops, and shirt buttons. If you plan on being outdoors for several hours, you may need to reapply the product. Change your clothes and launder them when you get home. Take a shower and wash away any loose chiggers.

Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital recommends cleaning the area well with soap and water. If needed, consider an antihistamine for itching or acetaminophen for the discomfort. Consult with a physician if there is persistent pain, signs of infection, or you develop a fever.

Call 911 if the individual has signs of a severe allergic reaction, such as trouble breathing, tightness in the throat or chest, feeling faint, dizziness, hives, and/or nausea and vomiting.