

## Frequently Asked Questions

### *Tennessee sure has a lot of bugs – what kind of treatment can you use to get rid of Chiggers?*

#### **Chiggers (also called Jiggers or Red Bugs)**

Chiggers are so small that most cannot be seen without a magnifying glass. You know you've been around chiggers after the fact, when you get small red welts that produce a lot of itching. Chiggers like to get into tight places under clothes, like waistbands and socks, or in armpits, the back of knees, ankles, front of the elbow, or in the groin. Some people say that chiggers burrow under the skin and come out at night to romp around, but that isn't true. A chigger inserts its mouth into a pore or hair follicle in the skin and injects a substance that both liquefies the cells (that they then suck up) and that forms a hard feeding tube. They stay on the skin for up to four days before dropping off. Once they drop off they will not reattach themselves to you. Chiggers in the U.S. don't spread any diseases, but scratching the bite can open the skin and lead to infection.

If you've gotten chiggers you need to wash the clothes you wore in hot, soapy water, otherwise there may still be chiggers present. You should also take a hot shower or bath and wash good with soap. This may remove the chiggers from your skin, but it won't stop the effect of their bites. If scratching breaks the skin apply antibacterial cream if needed and monitor for infection. See the treatment suggestions in the introductory paragraphs under "Insect Bites and Stings."

Prevention: Chiggers like moist shady areas with tall grass, weeds, and other plants. Avoid these areas and/or keep your own yard clear of thick vegetation. When going into areas that might have chiggers use an insect repellent on your clothes and exposed skin. Be sure to carefully follow directions on the label of the repellent. Chiggers can get through and into clothes, but high boots and tightly woven pants tucked into socks or boots can help.

#### **Fleas**

Fleas bite humans and animals in order to feed on their blood. The bite can leave a small red bump that can itch. Scratching might break the skin and lead to a possible infection. If the skin is broken from scratching, wash it with soap and water and, if needed, use antibacterial cream. See your health care provider for further treatment, if needed. Though rare in the southeastern United States, infected fleas can spread [typhus](#) and [plague](#) to humans.

If you find you have a flea infestation, treat your pets with a flea insecticide and treat the inside of the house. You may find that you also need to treat the surrounding areas outside of your house. Vacuum all floors and upholstered furniture then place the vacuum bag inside of a sealed plastic bag and throw it in the outside trash. If you leave the vacuum bag in the house, the fleas can again infest the area. You may find that you have to go through this treatment process more than once for it to be successful, because flea eggs may hatch after the first treatment

In Florida there are two kinds of poisonous spiders, the black widow and the brown recluse (also called violin or fiddleback). Both spiders usually bite only in self-defense when disturbed by humans. A black widow's bite can cause intense pain, rigid abdominal muscles, muscle cramping, local sweating, nausea, vomiting, and hypertension. A brown recluse's bite may cause no symptoms or it may cause pain, burning, itching, and swelling at the bite; a headache or body aches; rash; fever; nausea or vomiting. Also a blister may develop at the site of the bite of a brown recluse. Sometimes the skin around the bite will die, turning purple then black, possibly leaving a scar.

See the treatment suggestions in the introductory paragraphs under "Insect Bites and Stings." See your health care provider for further treatment or if the reaction is severe seek immediate emergency medical care. Prompt treatment will help avoid more serious complications. If possible, place the spider in a container and bring it to your health care provider for identification.

For photos of the black widow and brown recluse spiders go to the website of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at [www.doacs.state.fl.us](http://www.doacs.state.fl.us) (Click on "Insect Questions," then click "Venomous Spiders in Florida").

Prevention: If you need to reach into areas where you cannot see like under boards, in woodpiles, or taking objects from an outdoor structure; working in a basement, attic or closet; or reaching into storage boxes you may want to wear gloves to protect against a possible spider bite.

## Ticks

Ticks attach themselves to people or animals in order to suck their blood. If you find a tick crawling on you, remove and kill it or wrap it in a tissue and flush it down the toilet. If the tick has already attached itself to you, grasp it close to its head with tweezers or fingernails and slowly pull it out and save the tick in a tightly closed plastic bag and put it in the freezer or put it in a container with alcohol because if you become ill your doctor may want to see the tick for identification. Clean the area with soap and water, wash your hands, and for the next two weeks watch for symptoms of [Lyme disease](#) (an acute inflammatory disease). Two other illnesses that can be spread by a tick bite are [Rocky Mountain spotted fever](#) and [Southern tick-associated rash illness](#). See your health care provider for further treatment, if you show signs of one of the above illnesses.

See the treatment suggestions in the introductory paragraphs under "Insect Bites and Stings." The Florida Department of Health also has information on their website [www.doh.state.fl.us](http://www.doh.state.fl.us). On the homepage click on "Diseases and Conditions."

Prevention: Use insect repellent on clothes and exposed skin. Be sure to carefully follow directions on the label of the repellent. When walking in areas that might contain ticks wear a long sleeved shirt and pants, plus tuck the pants legs into your socks. After being in such an area, check your body and remove any ticks. After removing a tick that was attached to you check the area for at least two weeks to see if a rash appears.

## INSECT BITES & STINGS

Most insect bites and stings are not dangerous. Usual symptoms might include stinging, itching, and mild swelling at the site of the sting or bite. When the symptoms are mild you can wash the area with soap and water, apply antibacterial cream if needed, and try not to scratch it. Scratching might break the skin and lead to a possible infection.

Further steps you can take, if needed, include: apply a cold wet cloth or ice to bring down the swelling; take over-the-counter pain relief medication; and/or use calamine lotion (for itching), hydrocortisone cream (for itching and swelling), or baking soda and water paste (for itching and swelling) on the site of the bite or sting, or other medication as recommended by your health care provider. An oral antihistamine can also lessen symptoms of an allergic reaction. You may want to discuss medication use with your health care provider prior to taking something; particularly if you have other medical problems, are currently using other medications, or if the medication is for a young child or an elderly person.

There are a small number of people who will experience an allergic reaction to a sting or bite from an insect and require immediate emergency medical care. If a person is going to have an allergic reaction the following insects are more likely to cause it: bees, hornets, wasps, yellow jackets, and fire ants. An allergic reaction can come on quickly, within seconds or minutes, and can become life threatening. This reaction is called [anaphylactic shock](#).