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NF96-269 Chiggers

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Chiggers

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Chiggers, also known as "redbugs, jiggers or harvest mites", are the immature stages of a tiny red mite. They inhabit areas of tall grass, associated with low, wet spots, ponds and stream banks, wild berry patches and forest underbrush. The larvae attach themselves to the clothing of people or to the fur of passing animals. Before settling down to feed, chiggers move to a constriction such as sock tops, waist bands or armpits. Feeding chiggers inject a salivary fluid which dissolves the host's cells, then suck up the liquefied tissue. Within a few hours, small, reddish, intensely itching welts appear. These bites may continue to itch for several days up to two weeks after the chigger is dislodged. Following these suggestions should provide some protection from chiggers:



1. 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.
2. Wear loose-fitting clothing and avoid sitting or reclining on the ground when camping, picnicking or working outdoors.
3. Apply a repellent containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) to shoes, socks and trousers before entering chigger-infested areas. Caution: some individuals may be sensitive to DEET. Always read and follow label directions.
4. Immediately after possible exposure to chiggers take a bath, thoroughly scrubbing the body with hot soapy water. This will kill or dislodge many of the chiggers.
5. 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 only increases irritation and may lead to secondary infection of the bite.
6. Where chiggers are a problem in landscapes, keep lawns and shrubbery well manicured especially in areas adjacent to dwellings. Eliminate tall grasses and weeds. Chiggers also can be reduced by spraying infested foliage with carbaryl (Sevin), chlorpyrifos (Dursban) or diazinon.

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