

Kimberly Engler
Texas Cooperative Extension
Program Specialist-Urban IPM
k-engler@tamu.edu

The Pyemotes Itch Mite

The Pyemotes itch mite was reported in North Texas this fall, after school nurses reported bites in Plano, Richardson, and North Dallas. These bites were reported on both children and teachers. Although some people blamed the bites on spiders, the bites were actually from itch mites living on the outdoor trees.

An outbreak of itch mites was first reported in the mid-1950s and then again in the early 1990s in the Midwest. In addition, the mites were reported in the summer and fall of 2004 in the Midwest. These mites were also reported in the fall of 2004 in areas of Oklahoma and North Texas.

Mites are not found in the class Insecta, so they are not insects. Instead, they are found in the class Arachnida along with ticks, spiders, and scorpions. They are 1/8 inch or smaller in length. The female Pyemotes itch mite can give birth to 250 mites that will mate immediately after birth. The itch mite is considered beneficial, since they feed on moth larvae. However, these mites can also bite humans.

When humans come into contact with these mites, the mites have the ability to puncture human skin. Since these mites tend to bite people accidentally, they are more of an irritant than a health threat. People involved in outdoor activities, particularly associated with leaves, are most likely to be bitten. The mites are usually blown by the wind, so bites can occur anywhere. Bites most frequently occur on the neck, shoulders and upper body, if loose clothing is worn. The itch mite generally does not bite humans until three to four hours after contacting the skin. There is no pain associated with these bites, so most people are unaware of the bites. The next day, however, a red quarter-size wheal with a pimple in the middle appears.

These bites tend to be very itchy for several days, but then disappear within a week. However, sometimes their bites can lead to heavy scratching, which sends some people to seek medical help. Usually antibiotics are prescribed to relieve the itching. Some other suggestions for treatment are calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream to relieve the itching.

To reduce the number of mite bites, DEET and other repellants provide some protection. Also, a change of clothing and a hot, soapy shower within three to four hours after outdoor activities should reduce the number of bites. Spraying of insecticides tends not to be effective in controlling these mites.

It is an unusual occurrence for these mites to cause an infestation within outdoor areas, so do not refrain from outdoor activities.