

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Oak Leaf Mites (Itch Mites)

What You Need to Know

What are itch mites?

Itch mites are tiny insect-like creatures that are nearly invisible to the naked eye. There are several different kinds of itch mites in the United States. Females, full of offspring, are relatively large than the males because of an extended abdomen (belly) in which the offspring, which can number up to 250, grow to adulthood. In the Independence area, residents are most likely to see the oak leaf gall mites.

Can people be bitten by itch mites?

Yes. Although the oak leaf gall mites have been reported to feed on many different insects, it is when they have become very numerous, eliminating their current food source, that they will search for alternative hosts and can accidentally bite people. Mites usually need about four hours on your body before they bite. Once the mite's regular food source is gone from the leaves, usually in late summer, the mites drop from the trees. Oak leaf gall mites are so small that they can float on the wind, and pass through window or door screens and loosely woven clothing.

How will I know if I have been bitten?

You may develop redness of the skin with small, raised, pimple-like bumps that look like chigger bites on your neck, face, arms and upper body. These bites are not usually on legs where chigger bites may be found. The itch mite swellings will begin to look like pimples after about 12 hours. The bites are very itchy and can be present for up to two weeks.



Itch mite lesion on an arm

What should I do if I think I have been bitten?

- If you see brown and crusty edges on oak tree leaves, be aware that mite activity is possible. Do not sit under oak trees or on nearby lawns.

- Most bites tend to occur in the late summer into fall when the mite has built up large populations.
- If you are in an area where itch mite associated rashes are occurring, or nearby oak trees that have brown and crusty edges:
 - When weather permits, keep windows shut from August through October when “mite-showers” can occur.
 - Remove clothing items each day and wash them. Take a warm, soapy shower after coming indoors, especially after gardening, raking leaves or performing other outdoor activities.
 - Use calamine lotions and other itch creams to reduce the itching - that at times can be intense. Scratching of the bite locations is discouraged as it can result in bacterial infections.

Can I use DEET or another insect repellent?

Since mites only bite people when they accidentally fall on them, DEET and other insect repellents may not work. However, to prevent being bitten by mosquitoes, which can carry other diseases such as West Nile virus, you should use insect repellents with DEET.

Can itch mites live in my home?

No, in order to survive, itch mites need to feed on insect larvae, which are usually found on the inside of tree leaves.

If the mites come from oak trees, should the trees be sprayed or removed?

No. Since mites feed on insect larvae (galls) that are inside the edge of leaves, tree sprays do not penetrate the galls and therefore the mites are protected. Removal of trees is not necessary because these mites may not to be a problem every year.

For more information on Itch Mites, call (816) 325-7204

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