

Troy's Sandfly Presentation

Sandfly is a colloquial name for any species or genus of flying, biting, blood-sucking Dipteran encountered in sandy areas. A Dipteran is a 2 winged flying insect. Technically they are really a biting midge.

Biting midges are small robust insects with piercing and sucking mouthparts that belong to the family of flies Ceratopogonidae. Only a few groups within this family are known to suck blood and their distribution is almost world wide. These small flies are renowned for their nuisance biting associated with habitats such as coastal lagoons, estuaries, mangrove swamps and tidal flats. In Australia these flies are commonly known as sandflies but are correctly referred to as biting midges.

The biting activity of adult biting midges is mainly limited to the periods of dawn and dusk; they will remain inactive through very windy weather, finding shelter amongst vegetation. Biting midges will usually disperse only short distances from their breeding sites. Only female midges feed on blood, but both the females and males will feed on vegetable fluids and nectar. Adult midges are 1.5-4.0 mm long with stout short legs.

Female midges may attack humans in large numbers, biting on any areas of exposed skin, and often on the face, scalp and hands. Some species will blood feed on a wide range of animals. The egg batches contain between 30-100 eggs, and are laid on mud, decaying leaf litter, damp soil or other vegetation. The small eel-like larvae hatch in a few days. The whole life cycle takes 3-10 weeks, dependent on species and environmental conditions, particularly temperature.

Why are Biting Midge bites so unpleasant?

The anatomy of their feeding mechanism means that (unlike mosquitoes) they leave a large raised mark on the skin that is filled with damaged tissue and saliva (containing anticoagulants). This can cause certain individuals repeatedly exposed to their bites to become "sensitised" and trigger allergic responses. The direct impact on human health and wellbeing caused by midges is due to the allergens in midge saliva. These biting insects are not likely to transmit disease.

Clinical Presentation

Biting midges are responsible for acute discomfort, irritation and severe local reactions. Itching may commence immediately after the bite, but often not for some hours later, and most individuals are unaware of being bitten at the time. Local residents seem to build up some immunity to the biting. In some sensitive people, midges can produce persistent reactions that blister and weep serum from the site of each bite and these reactions may last for several days to weeks. Biting midges are not known to transmit any disease-causing pathogens to humans in Australia.

Treatment and Control

There are no known efficient methods of controlling biting midges, but personal protection will help in reducing exposure to their bites. Avoid localities, especially at dawn and dusk, that are known to be frequented by biting midges; wear protective clothing (long sleeves/pants), and apply a repellent to exposed skin. These measures will assist in limiting exposure to these biting flies.

To prevent acute allergic reaction and allow the body to develop its own immunity to midge bites vitamin B1 (thiamine) can be tried. This vitamin has an anti-histamine type action. An adult dose of 200mg twice a day with meals, preferably starting 2 weeks before exposure to midge, as immunity is developed this dose can be reduced.

Persons who have a more acute reaction to midge bites may require anti-histamine drugs such as Telfast, Polaramine and Zyrtec. You should consult your family doctor before trying these therapies.

Mosquito coils or plug in insecticide tablet burners may be necessary during periods of severe midge nuisance. Home made repellents which are popular and are sworn by people up in the Northern parts of Australia are as follows:

*1 part baby Oil, 1 part Metho and 1 part Dettol.

*1 part baby oil, 1 part citronella oil, 1 part Dettol.

SOOV it Haemorrhoid cream whose active ingredients are Hydrocortisone (It has anti-inflammatory effects by reducing [histamine](#) secretion) and lignocaine which is a common [local anesthetic](#) after applied stopped the itching within 1 minute and lasted 8-10 hours. This was recommended by 2 pharmacists in Port Hedland.

My favourite remedy is to rub a mixture of Bourbon (the cheap stuff, don't waste the good stuff) and sand on your arms, legs etc and then, when they bite they get drunk and throw rocks at each other leaving us alone.