



Bird Mites: Prevention and treatment

Bird mites are naturally found where birds (such as pigeons, starlings, sparrows and poultry) and their nests are located.

However, in the first few weeks after birds leave their nests, bird mites may infest homes in search of a blood-meal from humans. Bites from bird mites can cause severe irritation.

What are bird mites?

Bird mites are found in the warmer regions of the world, including Australia.

There are several species of bird mite but the most common species affecting humans is the domestic Starling mite, *Ornithonyssus bursa* from the family *Macronyssidae*.

Bird mites are:

- small (<1mm long) mites with 8 legs
- very mobile
- semi-transparent in colour until blood has been digested when they appear reddish to blackish
- oval in shape with a sparse covering of short hair.

Where are bird mites found?

Bird mites are generally associated with moist or humid conditions and are most active during spring and early summer.

Bird mites are naturally found where birds (such as pigeons, starlings, sparrows and poultry) and their nests are located.

Humans can be exposed to bird mites when young birds leave their nests and the mite is left without a suitable host to feed from.

They may move into living spaces in houses, climbing on walls, ceilings and bedding in search of a blood meal.

How do bird mites survive?

Bird mites:

- feed on the blood of birds
- survive and thrive in bird nesting material
- increase their numbers rapidly
- generally die within 3 weeks if without a blood meal from a bird host.

Get rid of bird mites in 3 steps!

Step 1: Identification

Proper identification of bird mites is very important in determining how to control mite infestations.

Step 2: Finding and removing bird nests

The best approach for controlling an infestation is to locate and remove bird nests.

When removing nests, a mask and gloves should be worn to prevent transfer of mites, and bacterial infections.

Nests may be found:

- around eaves and in chimneys
- in roof spaces
- in cavities in walls
- in foundations and basements
- around porches
- on window ledges.



Public Health Fact Sheet

Step 3: Prevention and eradication

Prevent birds from occupying spaces in houses by repairing broken tiles and blocking openings in eaves or roof cavities.

To eradicate bird mites, treat the area with an approved insecticide such as a surface spray or insecticide powder.

A registered pest controller may be required if the nesting material is inaccessible or large areas are involved.

How do bird mites affect humans?

Bird mites will feed on humans but do not live on humans as they cannot complete their life cycle on humans. Therefore, infestations are generally self-limiting if birds and nesting have been eradicated.

Bites from bird mites:

- cause severe irritation including itching, swelling and raised reddish spots on the skin caused by mites injecting saliva when feeding
- cause discomfort
- may result in secondary infections from scratching
- are not associated with transmission of any infectious disease
- are often difficult to diagnose and can be mistaken for the bites of other insects.

The sensation of crawling bird mites on the skin will irritate some people.

Bird mites **do not**:

- prefer to bite any particular part of the body
- live under the skin.

How can you avoid bird mite bites?

The best way to avoid bird mite bites is to apply an insect repellent containing diethyl meta-toluamide (DEET) or 3-methyl-n-diethylbenzamide.

An anti-itch cream or lotion may reduce irritation associated with bites.

Further information

If you believe you have a bird mite infestation at home, contact:

- your local council Environmental Health Officer
- the Department of Health on 8226-7100 or go to our website: www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environmental-health-index.htm.
- the Museum of South Australia.

Contact

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