Biting Midges

Biting midges do not transmit diseases to humans however are common nuisances along the coast of Australia.

What are biting midges?

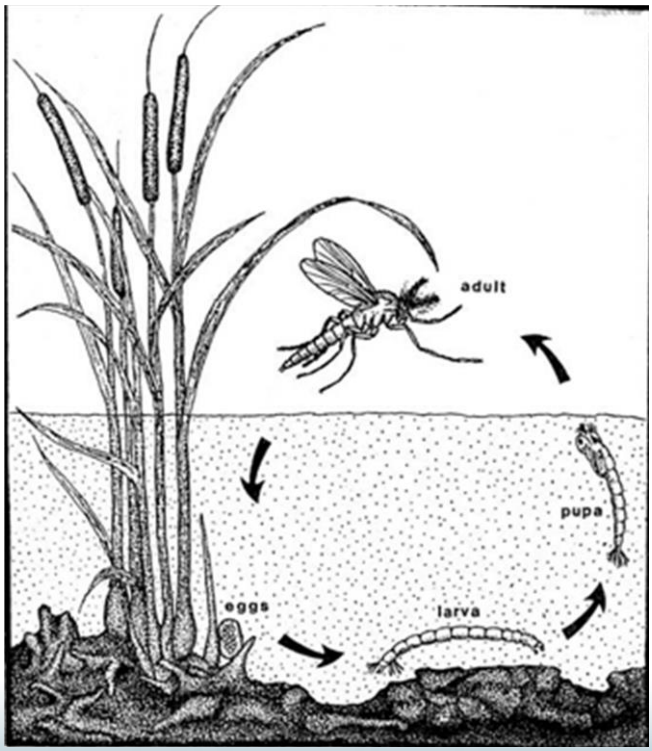
Biting midges are like mosquitoes where only the female midge bites and requires a blood meal to fertilise their eggs. They are attracted to human habitation resting on screens, fences and vegetation while waiting to take a blood meal.

As the biting midge is small and easily blown about by prevailing winds, they prefer dull still days with high humidity when seeking a meal.

Midges are particularly more active during the warmer months of September to April.

During dawn and dusk, midges are more active and most prevalent in suburbs close to mangroves and inter-tidal zones.

Midge life cycle



Adult females lay batches of eggs containing between 30-100 eggs, on selected grounds such as mud, decaying leaf litter, damp soil or other vegetative materials. Larvae then hatch from the eggs a few days later in water containing high organic content. The larvae moult through four (4) larval stages, before turning into pupa, where feeding ceases. Shortly after the adult emerges and females go in search of a blood meal to continue the cycle. The life cycle takes between 3-10 weeks, depending on species and environmental conditions, in particular the temperature.

Protection from biting midges

It is recommended to increase light and air movement around the house to reduce the risk of attracting and being bitten by midges.

Outside:

Midges prefer humid overcast conditions with minimal air movement. Anything you can do to reduce humidity, increase light and air movement will make your house and garden less attractive to midges. Closely mowed lawns, maintaining sparse vegetation around your house and having minimal surface water in the garden will decrease humidity and increase air movement so as to minimise the resting places for Midges.

Also avoid gardening or watering in the afternoon and early morning during their peak feeding times.

Inside:

Biting Midges can penetrate ordinary flyscreens and during peak infestations they enter houses looking for blood meals.

Electric fans increase air movement and can effectively create an area unsuitable for biting midges (as Midge activity reduces in wind speeds over 6-8 km/hr).

Spraying residual (surface) insecticide on your flyscreens will help stop midges from entering your home.

Burning mosquito coils inside can also assist in reducing numbers.

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Repellents

Most insect repellents are effective against midges. For those who find repellents irritating an equal part mixture of baby oil, Dettol and eucalyptus oil is useful.

Alternatively, or in addition, cover exposed skin. Long sleeves and long trousers made of closely woven materials provide good protection. Wearing a hat and gloves when gardening can also reduce bites.

Other options

Biting midges are amongst one of the most complicated pest species to control and cannot be eradicated. In comparison to mosquitoes, poisoning larvae midges does not work due to their habitats and life cycle. The larvae of midge exist in mud and sandy substrates which makes treatment near impossible. There is currently no registered larvicide for biting midges, as the larvae occur in environmentally sensitive areas of the intertidal zone and dispersal patterns are poorly known.

Insecticide applications against adult midges is available, however this method provides only short term relief and repeated applications are necessary.

Treatment and control for adult midges

Various formulations of the natural insecticide, pyrethrum, are available from most plant nurseries and hardware stores. Pyrethrum has little residual capacity, so applications may be needed on a regular (weekly) basis while midges are causing a problem, particularly over the summer period. There are also some organic insecticides that can be used around the house and garden to reduce adult populations, however, due to their low residual capacity, regular treatments will be required.

Barrier treatments offer an extra level of protection against midges for around homes. The basic concept of a barrier treatment is to form an invisible chemical barrier around the property. This form of treatment is known as reduction or minimisation of adult midges, it is not an eradication treatment.

If you are unsure or have concerns about carrying out a treatment yourself, it is recommended that you engage a licensed pest control operator.

Environmental conditions affecting biting midge activity

Time of day- Most active around dusk and dawn.

Temperature- Activity increase with the temperature until between 27-32oC.

Wind- Activity decreases as the wind increases.

Moisture- Activity increases with the humidity, except when it is raining.

Season- Commonly more active during warmer summer months, though continually active in the Fraser Coast Region.

Tide & Moon- Adult flight activity increases shortly after high and spring tides.

For further information visit the Pest Management page at www.frasercoast.qld.gov.au, or phone Council on 1300 79 49 29.