

How to Treat No See Um Bites

User
Reviewed

Three Parts: [Know the Signs](#) [Home Treatment](#) [Possible Complications](#)

You may not spot swarming no-see-ums, but you'll certainly know when you've been bitten by them. These insects leave bite marks that can be extremely itchy and moderately painful. Thankfully, there are a few ways to treat the bites and soothe your symptoms.

Part 1

Know the Signs

- 1 Consider your location.** No-see-um bites usually swell up immediately, so consider where you're at when the bites develop to determine how likely it is for no-see-ums to be present.
 - These insects can be found in nearly any location with moist soil and fertilizer. Forests, wetlands, farm pastures, and beaches are among the most common breeding grounds, but it's not uncommon for the bugs to exist in your own backyard.^[1]
 - No-see-um bites can also occur indoors if a breeding ground is located nearby outdoors.
 - Keep the season in mind, too. No-see-ums are most active during May and June, when the weather is just beginning to warm up. The problem will usually last for a few weeks before the bugs go away.
- 2 Identify the welt.** A no-see-um bite initially appears as a small red dot. This dot can expand into a welt that is 1 to 2 inches (2.5 to 5 cm) in diameter.^[2]
 - When the bug bites, it injects saliva into the skin. This saliva is what causes the welt and the allergic reaction.
 - Welts usually last for two weeks, give or take a few days.
 - No-see-um bites are usually very itchy and can become mildly painful.
- 3 Look for multiple bites on exposed skin.** No-see-ums can bite multiple times and typically feed in large groups, so you'll usually find clusters of bite welts instead individual ones.
 - Moreover, no-see-ums do not inject you with a numbing agent as they bite, so you will probably feel each bite as it happens.
 - Most bites occur on the legs, hands, and back of the neck, but any area of exposed skin is a vulnerable point.
- 4 Know how no-see-ums look.** No-see-ums are aptly named since they are so tiny and difficult to spot. If you do happen to catch sight of the bug that bites you, though, it helps to know what you're looking for.
 - No-see-ums are only about 1/16 inch (1.5 mm) in length. They have wings, but at that size, those wings are hardly visible. At first glance, the insect may look like a flea.

Part 2

Home Treatment

- 1 Avoid scratching the welts.** One of the most important things to do when you have a no-see-um bite is to stop yourself from scratching it.
 - Scratching the welts can cause them to break open. Once a welt breaks open, it is far more likely to become infected.
 - It's a good idea to keep your fingernails short and clean for the duration of bite. You may scratch the area without thinking, and if dirt and bacteria are trapped beneath your nails, the site can quickly become infected.

- 2 Wash with soap and water.** As soon as you notice the bite-ridden area, gently wash it with a mild antibacterial soap and warm water.
 - Washing the area immediately helps reduce the risk of infection. It can also get rid of any residual no-see-um saliva sitting on the surface of your skin, thereby reducing the amount of irritation you'll feel.

- 3 Numb the bite.** When the bites begin to swell, you can stop the swelling by applying a cold compress or ice pack.
 - Soak a clean washcloth in cold water and gently press it over the bite area for 10 minutes to reduce initial swelling.
 - To numb pain or more severe swelling, wrap several ice cubes in a clean washcloth and press that against the bite site. You could also use a bag of frozen vegetables. Numb the area in 10 to 15 minute intervals as needed for the first 24 hours.

- 4 Apply hot water to each bite.** Heat water to an approximate temperature of 180 degrees Fahrenheit (82 degrees Celsius). Dunk the tip of a cotton swab in the water, then apply the scalding water directly over the bite.^[3]
 - This treatment works best for bites that itch but don't hurt.
 - When you apply the hot water, expect the bite to sting slightly for several seconds. The stinging should stop quickly, however, and the itch should be subdued.
 - Only use this application two or three times per bite.
 - Never apply scalding water using anything larger than a cotton swab. Too much can cause a burn.

- 5 Try a topical analgesic or antihistamine.** A standard over-the-counter analgesic cream can usually reduce pain associated with no-see-um bites, while a standard antihistamine can relieve itching.
 - Always follow the package instructions to determine proper application and dosage. Usually, you will need to apply a thin layer of the medication directly over the bite using your fingers.
 - Use a cream, ointment, or other rub for best results. Sprays are not as effective against insect bite relief.
 - Counterirritant analgesics may work best for painful bug bite relief. Ingredients in these treatments create a burning or cooling sensation that can distract the mind from the pain caused by the bite.

- 6 Switch to a cortisone cream.** If topical analgesics and antihistamines are not effective, try a cortisone cream, instead.
 - Cortisone creams tend to be a little stronger than antihistamines and work in a different manner. They essentially block the body from releasing chemicals or activating cells that can worsen itching and swelling.
 - Follow the package instructions carefully and never apply more than directed.

- 7 Use a zinc ointment.** Obtain an over-the-counter zinc cream or ointment. Apply the product as directed on the package.
 - Zinc creams are often used against rashes and minor skin irritations.
 - Apply a thin layer directly over the bite and cover the area with a bandage to prevent the cream from getting wiped away. Immediately stop use if your symptoms worsen.

- 8 Treat with aloe vera gel.^[4]** Aloe vera is a natural treatment. The plant possesses qualities that help numb pain and itchiness.
 - Apply a generous amount of aloe vera gel over the entire affected area. It is usually safe to use large quantities of aloe vera, but as always, you should follow the label instructions when applying this treatment.

- 9 Consider an oral medication.** Topical treatments usually have the highest odds of success, but in some cases, an over-the-counter oral drug might be more effective.
 - Treat pain and inflammation with a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, like aspirin or ibuprofen.^[5]
 - Use an oral antihistamine to treat itchiness or other signs of mild to moderate allergic reaction, like hives.

Part
3**Possible Complications**

- 1 Consult a doctor immediately if you have a severe reaction.** If you experience an abnormally severe allergic reaction, you might need prescription treatment.
 - For severe swelling, your doctor may prescribe prescription antihistamines or corticosteroids.
 - If you experience wheezing, difficulty swallowing, or swelling/itching anywhere else on your body other than the location of the bite, seek emergency medical treatment. Such reactions may need to be treated with an injection of adrenaline or a similar intravenous medication.^[6]

- 2 Monitor the bites for signs of infection.** Infection is the main risk you face when dealing with no-see-um bites. If you suspect that an infection has developed, you should contact your doctor.
 - Common signs of infection include fever, headache, and nausea. Swollen glands are also symptomatic of infection.
 - Observe the bite. Bites that are filled with pus or abnormally tender after several days are typically infected.
 - An infected bite may need to be treated with an oral antibiotic. Take this medication as instructed by your doctor.

- 3 Watch out for symptoms of disease.** While it is rare, no-see-ums can spread disease through their bites. This is an even greater risk if you got the bites while staying in a tropical climate.
 - Leishmaniasis is the disease most commonly spread by no-see-ums, even though the risk of getting this disease is still quite small. It occurs when the insect passes a certain protozoan parasite into the body through its saliva.^[7]
 - Symptoms can vary, but aggressive skin sores that develop after the standard two-week welt period almost always form. Other symptoms can include fever, weight loss, cough, diarrhea, lethargy, and anemia. If left untreated, leishmaniasis can be fatal.

Community Q&A

My bites are now red dots. I have RA, so I am on immunosuppressants. Does this mean these bite marks may take as much as a month to disappear?

wikiHow
Contributor

The bites will take a long time to fade, if they ever do. Use anti-itch spray to relieve the worst of it and alcohol wipes to keep bites clean.

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Should I see a doctor if I've been bitten by no-see-ums?

wikiHow
Contributor

I use colloidal silver liberally to stop the itch several times til it's gone. It may take several days, but it always works and prevents infection.

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My dots seem to be spreading even though I am no longer near where the bugs are! What can I do?

wikiHow
Contributor

Seek the help of your dermatologist and keep track of every bite. Count how many will usually appear in a 24 hour period. Give your doctor this information and they should be able to prescribe an antibacterial medication that will help. It worked for me.

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How do I get rid of insects from my home?

wikiHow
Contributor

Turn your thermostat down to about 62 degrees. Keep your doors and windows closed tightly and check for any cracks anywhere in your home that may need sealing.

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Warnings

- Prevention is always best. To prevent no-see-um bites, you should:
 - Avoid spending much time in areas that might be possible breeding grounds.
 - Reduce skin exposure when in breeding ground areas by wearing long sleeves, long pants, socks, shoes, and a hat. Light clothes are better than dark clothes.
 - Apply insect repellents, like those containing DEET or botanical ingredients. Note that repellents are not always effective against no-see-ums, however.

Sources and Citations

1. <http://healthresearchfunding.org/handle-noseeum-bites/>
2. <http://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=10473>
3. <http://www.rversonline.org/ArtMexNo-See-Ums.html>

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