

Be Aware of a New Pest...the Kissing Bug

Seems like out of the “blue sky” here we are hearing about another new pest. While the kissing bug has been found in Tennessee, I have not heard of it being found locally. It is called the kissing bug because of its preference for biting humans around the mouth and eyes, according to a research team at Texas A & M. It may also be referred to as a cone-nose bug or a chinch. You’re probably thinking like me. Here’s another pest and possible health hazard to worry about.

The health concern with this new pest is Chagas Disease. According to the Texas A & M Research Team, this pest has the greatest potential of emerging as wildlife, domestic animals, humans, and insect populations intersect. Studies have shown 50% of the kissing bug population to be infected with the parasite that carries the Chagas disease.

The spread of the parasite actually requires more than just a bite from the kissing bug. The kissing bug sheds the parasite through its feces. The bug must defecate near the bite, allowing the feces to infect mammal tissue with the parasite. Infection in dogs is more likely to occur where there are large populations of dogs, such as in kennels. Currently, there are not any vaccines that protect humans or dogs against Chagas disease.

The kissing bug is nocturnal and is attracted to mammal blood. So you may ask, “What does this bug look like?” It will likely be between 3/4 inch and 1 and ¼ inch. It will have a distinctive “cone-like” extension to its head and it may have an orange or red band around its body. The bugs are likely to be found around woodpiles or in leaves and other yard debris. They are also attracted to our houses and dog kennels, where there is heat, light, and carbon dioxide. Because of their nocturnal habit and attraction to light, the research team says outside lights can attract these bugs.

The best option for control is to minimize the chance of entry into your home by eliminating leaf litter and debris from around your house. The option for killing the pest is to spray a pyrethrin such as permethrin or cyfluthrin. Control of this pest will be challenged because they can fly to your house from several houses away.