

AUBURN PHARMACY

Oak Mites

What you may not be looking forward to later this summer. You may be familiar with the dreaded pests that have emerged in Kansas City and its surrounding areas the past couple of years known as Oak Mites. If not known by the name, you may associate them with the long-lasting and painful itching that occurs when bitten.

Oak mites first appeared in Kansas in 2004 and again in 2009. They then went dormant for a few years until there were two consecutive years in 2015 and 2016 they made their comeback.

Will Kansas experience another year of these pesky, evil mites? Only time will tell! Female oak mites feed off of the larvae (or eggs) of insects found in oak trees. The mites will burrow themselves in the pin oak leaves and will feed for about a week while they develop their offspring. A single female can produce up to 200-300 offspring. While the males do not feed, they will mate and then die. The female offspring will seek a new host within the same tree or will be dispersed by the wind and can travel hundreds of miles. As many as 370,000 oak mites can fall from the oak trees each day.

Oak mites begin to emerge from the oak tree leaves from late July, and depending on the weather conditions may not disappear until late fall. Oak mite bites can be associated with bites that appear with a raised red area, with a small centralized blister that is itchy and painful when scratched. Because these pests travel by wind or by falling from tree branches above, the bites typically occur in the upper region of the body such as the neck, shoulders, chest, and arms. The mites cannot be seen by the naked eye and are small enough to get through loose clothing. Because bite marks usually do not appear until 10-16 hours after exposure, you may notice you have been bit until the following day.

The individuals who are more likely to be exposed to oak mites are those raking leaves, sitting under infested pin oak trees, or handling pets who have been exposed. If working outside under an infected oak tree be sure to cover your bare skin with gloves, long sleeves, and pants.

To reduce the number of bites, avoid or limit the time of exposure under infested oak trees and be sure to bathe and wash your clothing in hot, soapy water after exposure. You can also protect your furry friends by bathing them with warm soap and water. You might be asking what you can do to get rid of these mites. The answer is not as easy as you may think. Unfortunately, insect repellents such as DEET or tree pesticides are not effective for protection or getting rid of the oak tree mites. The oak mite lives inside of the leaves and are protected in this way - not allowing the repellents to penetrate the leaf.

In conclusion, it is difficult to identify and distance yourself from these pests. If you happen to get an oak mite bite, try not to scratch - as this may cause an infection or worsen the itch. Doctors suggest using over the counter local/topical remedies for itch relief such as hydrocortisone cream or calamine lotion. If those do not quite cut it, non-drowsy oral antihistamines such as Claritin, Zyrtec, and Allegra may also provide relief from itching.



Yellow oak gall ball. Gall growth is caused by mite, wasp, midge, or occasionally another type of insect. It's the plant tissue grown in a deformed manner.

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