

Facts about Conenose Bugs in California

What are conenose bugs?

Conenose bugs (also known as “kissing bugs”) are blood-sucking insects that feed on rodents or other animals. Conenose bugs will also bite humans, and some people can develop allergies to their bites. These bugs have a long, cone-shaped head and a dark brown or black body and are mostly active at night. Adults have wings folded on their backs.

Where are conenose bugs found in California?

Conenose bugs can be found throughout most of California in natural areas, especially in rural foothill and mountainous areas. These insects often live in woodrat nests. Adult conenose bugs can fly and are attracted to lights – you may see these bugs near porchlights on warm nights. Conenose bugs sometimes enter homes under doors or through open windows to find shelter and food. Most conenose bugs inside homes are found in and around couches and beds where they can feed on people while they rest or sleep.

Can conenose bugs spread diseases to people?

Conenose bugs can transmit the parasite (called *Trypanosoma cruzi*) that causes Chagas disease. This disease can affect certain muscles in the body and cause swelling or other problems in specific organs. Chagas disease transmission is very rare in the United States, but it is a concern in rural areas of Latin America, including in Mexico, Central America, and South America. Chagas disease may also be transmitted from an infected pregnant woman to her developing baby or by blood transfusion. In the United States, blood banks test blood donations to see if they contain the parasite that causes Chagas disease.

You cannot get Chagas disease from the bite of a conenose bug. The parasite that causes Chagas disease only comes from the feces of an infected conenose bug. Some types of conenose bugs defecate (poop) right after they bite and suck blood. If a person scratches or rubs fresh conenose bug feces into the bite area, or into their eyes, nose, or mouth, they can become infected with the parasite that causes Chagas disease. The conenose bugs in California usually do not defecate while biting and often do so much later and away from the bite area. This is one reason why Chagas disease is rare in California.

Do I need to be worried about conenose bugs?

The greatest concern from a conenose bug bite is having an allergic reaction to the bite that can range from a mild irritation to a severe reaction. After a bite, some people may experience anaphylaxis, which can be very serious and cause difficulty breathing. Those people with severe allergies who live in areas where conenose bugs are

common should talk to a healthcare provider about the need to carry or use an injectable epinephrine device (like an “EpiPen”) for treating severe allergies.

If you have an allergic reaction to a conenose bite, go to the doctor or the emergency room immediately. If you have concerns about Chagas disease, talk to a health care provider.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) does not recommend testing conenose bugs for Chagas infection since it is not the bite of the bug that spreads the parasite, but the feces of the bug that can get scratched into an opening in the skin. Talk to a healthcare provider about how to get tested for Chagas disease if you think you may have been exposed. Commercial tests are available and can be used as early as eight weeks after exposure.

What should I do if I find a conenose bug where I have been sleeping or think I’ve been bitten by a conenose bug?

If you have been bitten by a conenose bug, wash the bite area with soap and water or disinfect it with an over-the-counter medicated cream. Most conenose bug bites occur in the home, often while a person is sleeping. Bites usually occur on areas of the body that are not covered by clothes (face, neck, arms, and shoulders). Bites are painless but may cause redness of the skin, itching, or swelling within 24 to 48 hours.

If you find a conenose bug that you think has bitten a person and you are concerned about Chagas disease, the first step is to have the bug identified (there are many other bugs in California that look like conenose bugs). If you have the bug or a photo of the bug, you may send it to your local vector control agency or the CDPH Vector-Borne Disease Section (address below) for identification. Include your contact information for follow-up discussion.

California Department of Public Health Specimen Receiving
Attn: VBDS Personnel
850 Marina Bay Parkway
Richmond, CA 94804
Email: VBDS@cdph.ca.gov

What can be done to prevent conenose bug bites?

The most important step is to avoid contact with conenose bugs by keeping them out of your home. Follow the recommendations below:

- Seal windows and doors with weather stripping, sealant, and/or caulk to close all cracks. Pay special attention to gaps underneath doors.
- Make sure window screens, door screens, and pet doors fit tightly – fix any holes in these screens where bugs might be able to crawl through.
- Add screens to chimneys and vents to prevent rodents and other small animals from living inside your home (bugs can breed in rodent nests).
- Replace outdoor lights with yellow bulbs that are less attractive to night-flying insects.

- Move porch lights away from doors if possible.
- Avoid carrying conenose bugs into the house by checking firewood and other outdoor items that you carry into the house.

You can also take steps to reduce places around your home where conenose bugs might live. Conenose bugs like to live in woodrat nests, scrap piles, stacks of firewood, and stored vehicles.

- Clean up clutter around and under your home, in the attic, garage, barns and/or storage sheds.
- Remove woodrat nests close to your home.

If you follow these suggestions but still have a problem with conenose bugs inside of your home, you may need to call a licensed pest control company to treat your home for pests.

For more information, visit the [CDPH Conenose \(Kissing\) Bugs and Chagas Disease webpage](#) or [CDC's Chagas Disease webpage](#).

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