

POISONology

SAFETY & FIRST AID TIPS FROM THE ARIZONA POISON AND DRUG INFORMATION CENTER

A bug with 5 names



This is a bug with at least five names! We're talking about the "Kissing Bug," "Assassin Bug," "Mexican Bedbug," and the "Wallapai Tiger." You may have heard of at least one of these labels, but they are all "officially" called the conenose bug.

They are attracted to our homes by the lights and go into hiding during the day. They feed off of humans and animals much like mosquitoes and are frequently found in packrat nests

Wouldn't you hate to wake up in the morning with an unexplained bite that is red, swollen and itchy? We get this kind of call at the poison center. The caller often got bitten on the face but bites can be found anywhere on the body. You can wake each morning with new bites, each becoming more red and itchy.

Why do conenose bugs like your face so much? They are attracted to something in your breath called carbon monoxide. That's how they got the nickname, "Kissing Bug." They may be the only creatures on earth actually attracted to "morning breath"! The conenose bug will find a food source (you) and feed off of you each night until it moves on or you find it and kill it. They usually hide along the baseboards behind beds or furniture, sometimes in the crack between the mattress and box springs.

The biggest risk with conenose bugs is the possibility of a severe allergic reaction. Some people develop a severe allergy (life threatening) to them with multiple bites. This makes it important to locate the bug and kill it before the reactions worsen.

If you are bitten by a conenose bug, please call us at the poison center for advice. The treatment is simple; keep the bite sites clean with soap and water. Antihistamines like Benadryl, diluted ammonia solutions and bathing in Epsom salts solution may control itching. Severe reactions require medical treatment. Emergency allergy kits often are prescribed for patients who suffer severe reactions to use in case of future bites.

Call the tollfree national hotline at 1-800-222-1222 to reach your local poison center. If you live in Arizona outside of Maricopa County, this number will get you to our experts at the Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center in Tucson.