



Protect yourself from march flies



Photo MDA Lindsay.

March fly, a common pest species in the south-west of Western Australia.

Houses and workplaces

- Fly traps may be useful for reducing populations in areas such as schools and workplaces. Dark coloured boards (e.g. 60 cm square), coated with a permanently sticky adhesive have been used with some success overseas. Other commercially available traps may be sourced through the internet.
- Screen all doors and windows.

Travelling and camping

- Screen caravans and tents.
- Utilise screened shelters and avoid areas where march flies are active.

For further information contact:

- your local government Environmental Health Officer
- Environmental Health Directorate
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Cover photo is courtesy of MDA Lindsay.

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What are march flies?

March flies can be a serious pest to humans, livestock, domestic animals and wildlife. They are annoyingly persistent when attempting to bite and their bites can be very painful. There are more than 200 species in Australia and they are sometimes known as horse flies or tabanids.

Where do march flies breed?

March flies breed in places such as damp soil, rotting vegetation, sand and rot holes in trees. Their lifecycle from egg to adult can take months or years depending on the species and soil temperature.

Adults generally live for three to four weeks.

Where are march flies found in WA?

March flies can be found anywhere in Western Australia but are more common in warmer climates.

When are march flies most active?

Adult march flies are most active in daylight during the warmer months, particularly on calm, sunny days. In the tropics, they may continue to be active through the drier winter months.

What are the health impacts of march flies?

March flies are not known to transmit diseases to humans or livestock in Australia. Their bite, however, can cause serious allergic reactions in some people which may require hospitalisation. Livestock can suffer severe blood loss from repeated biting.

One species found in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia appears to produce serious symptoms in some people, including hives, fever, wheezing, and in severe cases, anaphylaxis (severe allergic reactions).

What medical treatments are available?

Applying an ice pack or using a mild antihistamine may offer relief from painful bites. Scratching the bites can result in an infection that may require the application of antiseptic cream or the use of antibiotics.

Patients with a severe allergic reaction should seek urgent medical assistance and advice.

Can march flies be controlled?

It is generally not possible to control march flies using large scale pesticide applications. This is due to the extensive size of their breeding areas and ability to travel long distances.

How can I avoid being bitten?

Cover up and use repellents

- March flies are known to be attracted to dark blue, so it is advisable to avoid wearing blue and other dark colours. Light-coloured, loose fitting clothing will provide some protection when march flies are present.
- Insect repellents are an important way of protecting yourself against march flies. When outdoors, use an effective insect repellent if march flies are active.
- The most effective repellents contain either diethyl toluamide (DEET) or picaridin.
- Lotion or gel repellents are the most effective. Always read the label. Apply and re-apply repellents in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Natural or organic repellents are generally not as effective as DEET or picaridin and may need to be applied more frequently.
- The best protection for babies and young children is protective clothing and other forms of insect screening. Only infant-strength repellents should be used on young children.