

# CENTIPEDES – “100 legs”



## APPEARANCE

Centipedes belong to class of Chilopoda. The name centipede, which means “100 legs”, can be somewhat misleading. Centipedes are elongated, with flat, segmented bodies what contain a pair of legs per segment. Centipedes occur in several colors and patterns but most common are brown and reddish orange. They range in size from 4 to 152 mm, depending on the species.

The heads of centipedes have a pair of long and sensitive antennae. They have small mouths and have large, clawlike structures that contain a venom gland. Because most centipedes are carnivorous creatures that forage for food at night, they use their claws to paralyze their victims, such as worms, spiders and small vertebrates.

Some species of centipede can be hazardous to humans because of their bite. Although a bite to an adult human is usually very painful and may cause severe swelling, chills, fever, and weakness, it is unlikely to be fatal. Bites can be dangerous to small children and those with allergies to bee stings. The bite of larger centipedes can induce anaphylactic shock in such people. Smaller centipedes usually do not puncture human skin. Even nonvenomous centipedes are considered frightening by humans due to their dozens of legs moving at the same time and their tendency to dart swiftly out of the darkness towards one's feet.

## BEHAVIOR, DIET & HABITS

Adult centipedes hide in moist, dark and secluded areas during winter. They place eggs in dampened soil during summer or spring. As centipedes become adults, they grow a complete set of legs and extra segments. Most centipedes live for more than a year and some up to six years. Centipedes may enter houses and buildings, but they do not roam during daytime. They hide in damp areas around bathrooms, closets, basements and other sites typically infested by pests. Centipedes detect prey through the use of their antennae, which are covered with dense hairs. Their prey is immobilized by venom injected from the maxilliped fang and held in place by the maxillipeds. Prey is passed to the mouth via the first and second maxillae and is then broken down by the mandibles. Most centipedes are carnivorous and prey upon soft-bodied insects, spiders worms and other arthropods, including other centipedes

## SIGNS OF A CENTIPEDE INFESTATION

Centipedes Typically leave no direct signs other than the sighting of the centipede itself. Centipedes are fast moving, agile, nocturnal animals. They are rarely seen by humans due to their nocturnal activity and the speed with which they move. While Centipedes have compound eyes containing as many as 200 optical units, others do not have eyes. All Centipedes have very poor eyesight and track their prey through the use of touch and smell. Centipedes are venomous.

Their venom allows them to attack prey and defend themselves against predators and other natural enemies. Centipede venom is not normally life endangering to humans, although the bite can be painful.

## CENTIPEDE BITE

A centipede bite is an injury resulting from the action of the Centipedes's forcipules, pincer like appendages that pierce the skin and inject venom into the wound. Such a wound is not technically a bite, as the forcipules are modified legs rather than true mouthparts. Clinically, the wound is viewed as a cutaneous condition characterized by paired hemorrhagic marks that form a chevron shape caused by the large paired forcipules of the centipede.

The centipede's venom causes pain and swelling in the area of the bite, and may cause other reactions throughout the body. The majority of bites are not life-threatening to humans and present the greatest risk to children and those who develop allergic reactions.

## SYMPTOMES

The history of a centipede bite is fairly straightforward; the victim typically sees and identifies the characteristic centipede before, or soon after being bitten.

Symptoms which are most likely to develop include:

- severe pain, which is usually in proportion to the size of the centipede
- swelling and redness
- swollen, painful lymph nodes in the regions of the bitten limb
- headache
- palpitations or a racing pulse
- nausea and vomiting
- anxiety
- local itching and burning sensations

The wound left by the bite may be accompanied by swelling, redness, and small puncture wounds which may form a circular pattern. This wound may be susceptible to local ulcerations and necrosis.

Ref: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/centipede](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/centipede)  
[insects.about.com](http://insects.about.com)  
[a-z animals.com](http://a-z animals.com)