

# MuseumPests.net

A Product of the Integrated Pest Management Working Group

## House centipede

*Scutigera coleoptrata*

**LOW RISK**

INDICATOR:  
INVESTIGATE ENVIRONMENT

### GENERAL INFORMATION

The house centipede is an arthropod characterized by its odd number of pairs of jointed legs, segmented body and exoskeleton that periodically molts as the centipede grows. All centipedes are primarily nocturnal. They are below ground hunters and are shy of light, though some species of Scutigera are seen actively in daylight as well. Lacking a waxy waterproofing layer on their cuticle, they prefer dark, damp environments. In nature they are found in wooded areas within rotting wood and under rocks and ground cover. They will enter manmade structures through cracks, uncapped blocks, missing mortar, and floor drains.

The house centipede does not present a direct risk to collections however its presence is an indicator of an increased level of other potentially harmful pests, as well as elevated humidity levels within the facility promoting an ideal habitat for the centipede.

While centipedes are known for their disturbing appearance, typically they do not present a serious threat to humans. All centipedes have poison glands which they use to hunt prey. Their bite may cause temporary discomfort and pain to humans but in most cases bites are unlikely to occur unless the centipede is deliberately handled.

### DIAGNOSTIC MORPHOLOGY

#### Adults:

- Adult body size is approximately one inch, appears three to four inches in length (including legs and large antennae)
- The legs are banded light and dark, and the body is a dirty yellow with three longitudinal, dark stripes.
- One pair of legs per body segment (15-191 pairs, always an odd number).
- All possess "poison claws" (also called "prehensors" or "forcipules") beneath the head.



#### Immature Stage:



- They begin life with only four pairs of legs.
- Adulthood reached in about three years following successive molts.
- Each new molt produces an additional set of legs.

### SIGNS OF INFESTATION

House centipedes are nocturnal and desire dark, damp environments. They find shelter beneath concrete slabs, inside cement block walls, within floor drains, under and in cardboard boxes, and in general, within any damp, cool location. Due to their nocturnal preference, their presence may go undetected however daytime sightings may indicate a pronounced infestation.

### FOOD SOURCES

A few species of centipede are known to feed on plant material however all centipedes are primarily carnivorous and feed on a variety of prey ranging from spiders to small vertebrates. The House Centipede is known to prey on silverfish, firebrats, carpet beetle larvae, cockroaches, spiders, and other small arthropods.

### LIFE CYCLE

Centipedes hatch from eggs laid by the females. A maximum of 150 offspring can be produced during a female's lifetime. After hatching the larvae undergo six developmental stages, or *instars* and four post-larval instars within the span of three years before reaching maturity. The potential life span of a centipede is six years.

### CONTROL & TREATMENT

Eliminating paths of entry and decreasing food supply are the two main means through which centipede populations may be reduced. Sticky traps may be used to identify pests that are serving as a food source for centipedes. These monitors (along with service for identifying the specimens) can be obtained through a pest control company.

Harborage reduction is the second most important management tactic. Close cracks and crevices in concrete slabs with appropriate fillers. Seal the covers to sump pumps with screen and caulk. Install window screen in basement floor drains to prevent centipedes from entering from dry sumps. Reduce humidity by utilizing dehumidifiers. Grade the soil around the outside of the building to facilitate water movement away from the foundation.



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## Fact Sheet: House centipede

Resources:

Bug Guide. <http://bugguide.net/node/view/20>

Chilopoda (Centipedes) <http://www.earthlife.net/insects/chilopod.html>

Urban Pest Control Research Center website <http://www.upcrc.com/guides/houseid/hcentipd.htm>

Penn State University Department of Entomology. <http://ento.psu.edu/extension/factsheets/house-centipedes>

Photo credit: Adult- Troy Bartlett. [www.bugguide.net](http://www.bugguide.net)

Photo credit: Immature- Doug Wechsler. [www.bugguide.net](http://www.bugguide.net)

Fact Sheet: Prepared by students of Buffalo State University of New York, Fine Art Conservation