THE SCIENCE WORLD
A Monthly e Magazine
ISSN:2583-2212
Popular Article
October 2024 Vol.4(10), 3845−3849

Insects and Human Health: An In-Depth Exploration of Medical Entomology and Its Impact on Public Health

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13942712

Abstract

Medical entomology is a crucial field that examines the relationship between insects and human health, focusing on how various insect species impact the prevalence, transmission, and control of diseases. This discipline encompasses the study of vectors such as mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas, which are responsible for transmitting pathogens that cause significant public health challenges, including malaria, dengue fever, Lyme disease, and Zika virus. In addition to vector-borne diseases, medical entomology also addresses issues related to insect allergies, bites, and stings, which can lead to severe health complications. As global climate change and urbanization continue to influence insect populations and disease dynamics, the role of medical entomology becomes increasingly vital in safeguarding public health and enhancing disease prevention efforts.

Keywords: Medical Entomology, Vectors, Human health, Insects

Introduction

The study of insects that are significant to medicine, such as fleas, lice, flies, and mosquitoes, is known as medical entomology. However, the phrase "medical entomology" is typically used more broadly to encompass the group of invertebrates known as "arachnids," which are not insects but can nevertheless be very important to medicine. This group includes ticks and mites (Service, 1980). The study of insects that either spread disease to people or act as carriers of pathogens is known as medical entomology. For instance, studies in medical entomology may focus on the relationships between arboviruses and their hosts and encompass

biology, ecology, physiology, and genetics. More over 80% of all extant animal species are classified as arthropods, which are invertebrate animals with over a million species (Giribet and Edgecombe, 2012). Certain organisms, referred to as vectors, have the ability to actively spread dangerous microorganisms such as viruses, bacteria, or parasites from one vertebrate to another while consuming their blood meal (Mathison and Pritt, 2014).

Mosquitoes are the primary carriers of human disease and are responsible for hundreds of deaths annually in tropical nations from dengue fever and malaria. Furthermore, in the past 10 years, the Zika and Chikungunya virus outbreaks have drawn attention to instances of vector-borne infectious disease growth across the world, including regions of the New World (Simon *et. al.,* 2008; Musso and Gubler 2016).

Veterinarians are also aware of the negative effects of tick infestation, but in the past 15 years, the identification of multiple tick-borne rickettsioses and the 1980s discovery of Lyme disease have brought these diseases back into the spotlight in terms of medical significance (Parola *et. al.,* 2013). It is widely acknowledged that ticks are the second most common vector of infectious illnesses in humans globally.

Key Medical Insects and Their Diseases

1. **Mosquitoes:** *Culex* sp., *Anopheles* sp., and *Aedes* sp. (Culicidae: Diptera)

Mark of identification: Mosquitoes are tiny flies that resemble midges. Most species' females are ectoparasites, meaning that they puncture their hosts' skin with their tube-like mouthparts, or proboscis, in order to feed on blood. Adult females of most species deposit their eggs in stagnant water; some deposit their eggs close to the water's edge, while others cling their eggs to aquatic vegetation. The mosquito pupa is comma-shaped, as may be observed in its lateral appearance. The mosquito larva has a big thorax without legs, a segmented abdomen, and a well-developed head with mouth brushes used for feeding. The abdomen curves around beneath the head and thorax, which combine to form a cephalothorax.

Diseases: Overview of diseases such as malaria, dengue, Zika, and West Nile virus.

Diseases transmitted: □

Anopheles sp.- Transmits malaria caused by *Plasmodium* sp. □

Culex sp.- Transmits filariasis caused by W*uheretia bancrofti*.

Aedes sp.- Transmits dengue fever, encephalitis and yellow fever.

Prevention and Control: Current methods of mosquito control, including environmental management and larvicides.

2. **House fly**: *Musa nebulo*, *M. Domestica* (Muscidae: Diptera)

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Mark of identification: It is the most prevalent species of fly that inhabits homes. Adults have a single pair of membranous wings, a small hairy body, and four dark, longitudinal lines on the thorax. They range in colour from grey to black. The slightly larger female has red eyes that are spaced farther apart. These quickly hatch into white, legless larvae that are called maggots. After developing for two to five days, these turn into reddish-brown pupae that are about 8 mm (0.3 in) long. Flies that are adults typically live for two to four weeks, however they can hibernate in the winter.

Damage:

- Source of nuisance
- Transmits many diseases in human beings dysentery, cholera, typhoid, enteric fevers, tuberculosis, leprosy, anthrax, trachoma, gonorrhoea and many helminthic diseases.

3. Ticks: ***Ixodes scapularis, Ixodes*** spp. (xodidae: Ixodida: Archanida)

Life Cycle: In nymphs and adults, the capitulum is prominent and projects forwards from the body. The eyes are close to the sides of the scutum and the large spiracles are located just behind the coxae of the fourth pair of legs.

Diseases: Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and others. Members of the genus, Ixodes, are known vectors of *Borrelia burgdorferi* (Lyme disease), *Babesia* spp. (babesiosis), human granulocytic ehrlichiosis (HGE), and Russian spring-summer encephalitis virus.

Control Strategies: Focus on habitat management and personal protection measures.

4. **Fleas:** *Ctenocephalides felis* (Siphonaptera)

Mark of identification: Adult fleas are tiny, blood-sucking insects that are about 1/16 inch long and dark reddish-brown. The body is rigid, vertically flat (fish-like), covered in numerous hairs, and has short, backward-pointing spines. Long and well-suited for jumping legs. An mature flea's mouthparts are designed for sucking blood from a host. The young, or larval stages, are tiny, white worms with dark heads that are about 1/4 inch long.

Damage: Some animals allergic to the saliva of fleas become so unhappy from flea bites that they eat and scratch themselves raw. Human bites typically manifest as little, red, itchy lumps on the wrists and ankles.

Diseases: Plague, murine typhus, and flea-borne illnesses.

5. **Lice:** ***Pediculus humanus capitis, Pediculus humanus corporis*** (Pediculidae: Psocodea)

Mark of identification & Life Cycle: There are three lice which infest humans body louse, head louse, and the crab louse or pubic louse.

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A nymph is an immature louse that hatches from the egg. Immediately after hatching it starts feeding on the host's blood and then returns to the clothing until the next blood-meal. The nymph will molt three times before the adult louse emerges. The nymph usually takes 9–12 days to develop into an adult louse. The adult body louse is about 2.5–3.5 mm long, and like a nymph it has six legs. It is wingless and is tan to grayish-white in color.

Diseases: Unlike other species of lice, body lice can act as vectors of disease. The most important pathogens which are transmitted by them are *Rickettsia prowazekii* (causes epidemic typhus), *Borrelia recurrentis* (causes relapsing fever), and *Bartonella quintana* (causes trench fever).

Control Measures: Treatments and public health strategies for lice infestations.

6. Sandflies: *Phlebotomus argentipes* (Psycodidae: Diptera)

Mark of identification: Adult sand flies are little, measuring just 3 mm in length, and have a golden, brownish, or grey colour. Their large, sharp mouthparts are perfectly suited for drawing blood from the target prey. What sets sand flies apart from certain other little flies is that when they are at rest, their hairy-looking wings are held in a vertical V-shape. In addition, the adults' six legs are noticeably longer than their bodies.

Damage: Adults causes painful bite, itching and swelling. Transmits diseases in man like kala-azar, three-day fever, tropical ulcer *etc.,* transmits anthrax in cattle.

Control Methods: Habitat modification and insect repellents.

??. **Cockroaches:** *Periplanata americana*, *Blatella germenica*, *Blatella orientalis* (Blatidae: Dictyoptera)

Mark of identification: The majority of species are reddish-brown to dark brown in colour, with a comparatively small head and a broad, flattened body. They possess two ocelli, long, flexible antennae, and big compound eyes. The mouthparts, which are located on the underside of the skull, consist of several touch and taste receptors, salivary glands, and generalised chewing mandibles.

Damage: Starchy material is ruined by excreta, offensive smell. Feed on damp books and leather articles management.

??. **Bed bugs:** *Cimex hemipterous* (Cimicidae: Hemiptera)

Mark of identification: Small, oval, brownish-colored bedbugs feed on the blood of people and animals. The bodies of adult bedbugs are flat and roughly the size of an apple seed. But when they eat, their bodies enlarge and turn reddish-purple.

Damage: Nymph and adult suck blood and inject toxic saliva during night which cause irritation, and painful itching. It does not transmit any diseases.

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??. **House mice:** *Mus musculus* (Rodentia: Muridae)

Mark of identification: House mice measure 7.5–10 cm from snout to base of tail for an adult, and 5–10 cm for the tail. They weigh about 40–45 g on average. White, champagne, and black are among the many colours that domesticated fancy mice and laboratory mice are created in. In the wild, they range in hue from light to dark agouti (light to dark brown). Their hair is short, and some subspecies have a light belly, but not all of them. They live in and around residences, business buildings, open fields, and agricultural grounds. Their ears and tail have minimal hair.

Damage: On occasion, house mice can contaminate food, cause damage to food packaging, and spread disease. Just a small number of the diseases included on the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's list of diseases spread by rodents really affect house mice. Although mice are capable of transmitting Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis (LCMV), human infections with this virus are uncommon, typically resulting in minor cases that are never detected. There is a worry that women should not contract LCMV while they are pregnant. Because house mice typically carry fewer flea infestations than rats and because their natural host, people, are not frequently bitten by house mouse-carried fleas, house mice are not typically considered human plague vectors.

Dust mite: *Dermatophagoides microceras* (Acarina: Pyroglyphidae)

Mark of identification: House dust mites are 0.3 mm long, eight-legged, microscopic organisms that are undetectable to the naked eye. They're not insects; they're arachnids, which are related to spiders. The mites possess hairs on their legs and bodies, and they have a globular form and a clear to creamy white colour. Damage: Asthma, eczema, and allergic rhinitis are the three main allergic illnesses where most attacks have been related to; dust mites are second only to pollen in generating allergic reactions. Not just mites are the root of the issue. A protein present in their droppings and carcasses is the allergen that triggers severe allergic reactions.

10. **Kissing Bugs:** *Triatoma infestans*, *Rhodnius prolixus* (Triatominae, Reduviidae: Hemiptera)

Mark of identification & Life Cycle: Triatomines undergo incomplete metamorphosis. A wingless first-instar nymph hatches from an egg, and may be small as 2 mm. It passes successively through second, third, fourth, and fifth instars. Finally, the fifth instar turns into an adult, acquiring two pairs of wings.

Diseases: Chagas disease and its impact on human health.

Control Strategies: Vector control measures and by using insecticides.

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Mosquito

House fly

Ticks

Fleas

Body Lice

Sandflies

Cockroach

Bed bugs

House mice

Dust mite

Kissing bug

Mechanisms of Disease Transmission

Biological Transmission: Pathogen development within the insect vector (e.g., malaria in Anopheles mosquitoes).

Mechanical Transmission: Pathogens are transferred externally on the insect (e.g., houseflies).

Host-Pathogen Interaction: Interactions between the host immune system and pathogens carried by insects.

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Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Strategies

Cultural Control: Practices to reduce vector habitats.

Biological Control: Use of natural predators or pathogens to manage insect populations.

Chemical Control: Role of insecticides and the emergence of resistance.

Surveillance and Monitoring: Monitoring insect populations and disease incidence for effective control.

Current Challenges in Medical Entomology

Insecticide Resistance: The mechanisms behind resistance and its implications for control efforts.

Emerging Diseases: Recent outbreaks and the factors contributing to their emergence.

Socio-Economic Factors: The influence of poverty, urbanization, and infrastructure on vector-borne diseases.

Innovative Approaches in Research

Genetic Modification: Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and their role in vector control.

Vaccination: The potential of vaccines against vector-borne diseases.

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