

Emerging Insect Pest for WNY?: Kissing Bugs

by Lyn Chimera

While working in the Hotline office in early October, a person sent in a photo of what he thought was a kissing bug (*Triatoma spp.*). There was another mention of this bug via email communication, and it was suggested that the sample be sent to the Cornell Insect Diagnostic Laboratory. The photo he sent was blurry, and I could not identify it. He was asked to send in more photos instead of bringing in the sample. He did send more photos, and Sharon ID'd it as a Western Conifer Seed Bug. The caution about not allowing a sample to be brought in peaked my interest as I knew nothing about Kissing Bugs, so I did some research.

Kissing bugs are long, dark bugs, $\frac{3}{4}$ inches -1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (19-32mm) with long legs and a very long proboscis (mouthpart) kept folded under its head when not feeding. Some species of *Triatoma* have checkerboard markings around the side edge of the abdomen and thin legs with all three pairs of legs being similar in size. Identification can be difficult as they look similar to a number of look-alikes, including box elder bugs, stink bugs, assassin bugs, western conifer seed bugs, and others. They are pervasive in southern climates, including Latin America, but have not been a concern in northern states due to the colder weather.

The name kissing bug comes from the fact that they tend to bite near the face and mouth while a person is sleeping. After biting, they defecate near the bite. It's the feces that hold a parasite that spreads Chagas disease. When a person itches the bite, they distribute the feces into the bite and the parasite into the bloodstream. Chagas disease can cause flu-like symptoms or lead to complications, including heart disease and stroke.

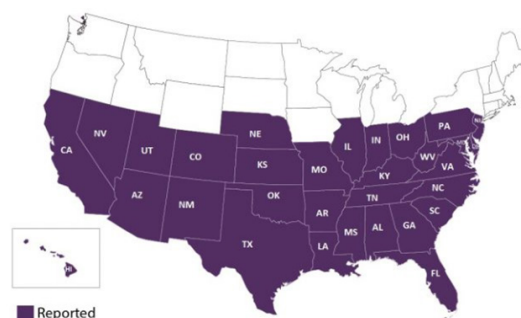
The kissing bug has been in Central America for a few thousand years and has migrated into the southern US.

This has not been an issue in the northern states due to the cold weather; however, now that the winters are warmer, they are slowly moving northward. (Editor: Kissing bugs have been found in Pennsylvania.) Luckily, none have been identified in New York. There has been national news coverage of the bug lately due to the increase in Chagas disease in the US. Since it is so difficult to differentiate between some of our common insects, we will be getting more calls from people thinking that they have found a Kissing bug. Remember what happened when Killer Hornets were discovered in Washington State? We got a lot of calls from people who were sure they had them.

For more information and pictures, visit:

<https://cals.cornell.edu/integrated-pest-management/outreach-education/whats-bugging-you/kissing-bug>

<https://health.osu.edu/health/virus-and-infection/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-kissing-bug>



Map of the U.S., with states that have reported triatomine bugs highlighted Source: CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/chagas/spreads/index.html>)



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