



# CAES

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## HOUSE CENTIPEDE (*Scutigera coleoptrata*)

Of the number of arthropods that can be found inside human structures, the house centipede is one of the most maligned despite its essentially beneficial nature. House centipedes are generalist predators of insects, spiders, and other arthropods, many of which are considered household pests.



**Fig. 1: Adult house centipede**

The native range of the house centipede is the Mediterranean region, where they can be found outdoors in moist leaf litter and rotting wood as well as in buildings. In temperate zones such as Connecticut, house centipedes primarily live and develop year-round indoors. Adult house centipedes have a long 1-to-2-inch segmented body with three dark

longitudinal stripes. They have 15 pairs of long striped legs (one pair per body segment). They have two antennae in front that are similar in appearance to their legs, making it difficult for potential predators to tell which way it is facing (Fig. 1). They are fast runners that actively chase down prey. Like other centipedes, house centipedes have a pair of forcipules (modified pincer-like legs) located directly underneath their mouthparts which can either administer a venomous sting to prey or be used in self-defense. Although it can cause temporary localized pain, a house centipede stinging a human is very rare. If a house centipede does envenomate a person it is the result of rough handling.

### **Life Cycle and Biology:**

Young house centipedes resemble adults but are smaller and with fewer legs (Fig. 2). After each developmental moult, the centipedes gain more legs. House centipede development is much slower than that of spiders or other insects, taking upwards of 3 years to reach sexual maturity. They are also long-lived and can live as long as 7 years.

House centipedes prefer cool, humid, dark environments. In homes they are most likely to frequent basements, cellars, and first-floor bathrooms. They are nocturnal and incredibly wary. Most that live in houses are never seen.

Their appearance may be startling due to their long legs and rapid movement, but they are not aggressive and will immediately flee if they are discovered. The centipede's reaction time in these situations is incredibly quick and they will dart away and hide under anything.



**Fig. 3: Young house centipede**

House centipedes do not cause harm to structures or to stored products, fabrics, pets, or humans. They are solely predators that actively hunt other arthropods such as cockroach nymphs, bed bugs, flies, ants, silverfish, spiders, and all other household pests. They are beneficial residents that act as biocontrol against building pests. This means that if house centipedes are present and actively hunting, there is little need to use pesticides inside buildings.

#### **Prevention and Control:**

Using pesticides to eradicate house centipedes is not recommended. To discourage centipedes from appearing out in the open, reduce the humidity levels in open areas by running fans or dehumidifiers. Address water issues to prevent dampness in basements. Make sure that sump pump seals are properly caulked and that any cracks and cervices in foundations are filled. These prevention methods also help to exclude nuisance insects that centipedes prey on from entering buildings, which in turn reduces the number of hunting centipedes.