



If you're thinking about investing some of your hard-earned savings in a swag, or tent to use in the harsh Australian climate then there are a few things you need to keep in mind. Aside from the usual factors – space, design, weight, pack size, waterproof qualities – you might want to consider how it holds up to insects.

We're not just talking about the poisonous 8-legged kind. The ones you really have to be wary of are so teeny tiny – about the size of a pin head and give painful, itchy, and irritatingly persistent bites.

That's right, a camper's worse nightmare – midges. Or as they're commonly called – sandflies.

## What's the deal with these midges?

If you haven't ever been acquainted with midges, let's give you a bit of background on these pesky blighters. They're part of the Culiocoides insect family, and unfortunately for us Aussies – there are 270 kinds found across the country (but not all of them bite).

They're found mostly near water and are most rampant during the new and full moon. The females are the ones that bite. They don't spread diseases through their bites, but if scratched, can result in infections for some. Pretty nasty huh?

So, what can you do to fend these suckers off? Well, the answer isn't set in stone, but we're going to give it a crack in this post.



*Will the mesh and zips on your tent keep out even the smallest biting insects? Photo: Harry Fisher*



## How do midges get into my shelter?

As they can be so unbelievably small – between 0.5mm – 4mm in size they can sneak through almost any gap in a fabric.

They might cling to your jacket or other clothing and follow you inside your tent, get in through a minute gap in a zip, a puncture hole made from the stitching process, or any other weak point that will be way for midges to wreak their havoc.

There's a world of information out there that lists what midges are attracted to, but it seems that humidity, still environments and of course – humans seem to be the main ones.

When you think about how a tent or swag is a stagnant sealed area, with plenty hot air and condensation, plus a live food source – it's no wonder midges are desperate to get in!

## What can I do to keep them out?

Often it can be a bit confusing, or just unclear whether your shelter will keep out midges. A lot of swags and tents feature 'superfine', 'ultrafine', or 'insect-proof' mesh over the windows and doors.

This doesn't mean that the shelter is midge proof, as in many cases midges are small enough to get through mosquito and other insect proof mesh.

What you want to look for is 'Sandfly-proof', 'Midge-proof', or 'No-see-um' mesh. This kind of mesh is theoretically designed to be fine enough to restrict midges from entering your shelter. Keep in mind the overall quality of your tent or swag is also important.

The reliability of the zips, and whether the seams are taped to close off holes made from manufacturing will also contribute to keeping midges out.

While midge or sandfly proof mesh will provide a good barrier, there are some other steps you can do to prevent being bitten.



*Be aware of the limitations of variations of mesh against tiny bloodsuckers like Midges.  
Photo: Darche.*

## **Ways to add to the insect or midge protection of your tent**

While there isn't a bulletproof formula for protecting against midges, there are some steps you can take to eliminate the risk.

### **1. Consider your location**

Avoid camping near the edges of water, as that's where they tend to be most prevalent. They breed in damp soil, decaying round, and sandy or muddy areas so be wary of where you set up.

### **2. Check your shelter for any entry points**

Before you head off on your trip, go over your tent or swag and look for holes in the mesh, or zippers that don't close properly. If your seams are looking a little worse for wear, it might be worth touching them up with some sealant.



*Be aware of where midges breed, anywhere near water can be a hotspot. Photo: Jolly Swagman*

### **3. Use residual insecticide on the mesh**

Spray the mesh of your tent, swag or shelter with permethrin- as that's where they're likely to try and get in. As far as we can find, permethrin seems to be the safest to spray on fabrics without causing damage.

It's best to make sure you read the label of the repellent and follow the instructions to ensure you're using it correctly and that it's appropriate for your use.

### **4. Be careful of your clothes!**

Midges, as well as other insects like mozzies, might cling to your clothes and hitch a ride straight into your tent.

So while you may not be able to see a midge on your jumper (especially in the dark) you can still shake off your clothes, to avoid other biting insects.



*Don't rely on your tent, make sure you use repellent and cover up around the campsite.*

*Photo: Bushman*

## 5. Cover yourself up and use proper repellent

This one's an obvious one, but it's gotta be said. Wear long sleeves and pants when you're walking around the campsite, and use sufficient repellent on any exposed skin that could be bitten if you're in a midge hot spot.

DEET or picaridin are widely considered to be the most effective insect repellents. Do your research and decide which one you are most comfortable with.

As always, read the instructions carefully and make sure you reapply at the correct times depending on the concentration. This won't add protection to your shelter itself, but it's a good precaution to take.

## 6. Be vigilant at dusk and dawn

This is when they're usually out in full force. If you know there are biting midges in the area, be extra careful at those times around camp.

Be wary of opening and closing the doors of your shelter. Get in and out quickly, and don't leave entrances unzipped.



## A final word...

It's important to be aware of the limitations that some tents and swags will have. Don't forget, if there is a way in - those darn midges will find it!

While midges can put a dampener on a trip, they shouldn't stop you from enjoying everything that the outdoors has to offer.

***Do you have any remedies, tip or techniques to avoid midges and other tiny biting insects? Let us know!***