

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of March 17, 2014 – Insect Bites and Bee Stings

We have now changed over to day light savings time (except Arizona where it's always day light savings!) and the official beginning of spring is only days away. It is time for much of the flora and fauna to emerge and while the scenery of the season can be beautiful, we still need to remember about protecting ourselves when going outside as insects and bees can be a hazard.

Bites from bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets and fire ants are typically the most troublesome. Bites from mosquitoes, ticks, biting flies, ants, scorpions and some spiders also can cause reactions. Scorpion and ant bites can be very severe. Although rare, some insects also carry disease such as West Nile virus or Lyme disease.

When bees or wasps sting a person, they inject venom through their stinger into the skin of the victim. Wasps, yellow jackets, and hornets have stingers without barbs that are usually retracted upon stinging, and, as a result, can sting people multiple times. The honey bee has a barbed stinger that remains in the victim's skin with its venom sack attached. About 3% of people stung by bees and wasps have an allergic reaction to the sting, and up to 0.8% of bee sting victims experience the severe and life-threatening allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis (a condition that severely affects the respiratory, cardiovascular, and gastrointestinal and central nervous systems).

Most people will have only a **localized reaction** to a bee sting. In the normal reaction to a bee sting, the skin is reddened and painful. Swelling and/or itching may also occur, but the pain usually disappears over a few hours. In the so-called large local reaction to an insect sting, the swelling, redness, and pain may persist for up to a week. Areas adjacent to the site of the skin may also be involved in the large local reaction.

Most reactions to insect bites are mild, causing little more than an annoying itching or stinging sensation and mild swelling that disappear within a day or so. A delayed reaction may cause fever, hives, painful joints and swollen glands. You might experience both the immediate and the delayed reactions from the same insect bite or sting. Sometimes, stings and bites can produce reaction that are severe, causing nausea, facial swelling, difficulty breathing, abdominal pain, and deterioration of blood pressure and circulation (shock).

For mild reactions one should move to a safe area to avoid more stings and remove the stinger, especially if it's stuck in your skin. This will prevent the release of more venom. Wash the area with soap and water. Apply a cold pack or cloth filled with ice to reduce pain and swelling. A pain reliever, such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others), to ease pain from bites or stings can be effective. Apply a topical cream to ease pain and provide itch relief. Creams containing ingredients such as hydrocortisone, lidocaine or pramoxine may help control pain. Other creams, such as calamine lotion or those containing colloidal oatmeal or baking soda, can help soothe itchy skin. Take an antihistamine containing diphenhydramine (Benadryl, others) or chlorpheniramine maleate (Chlor-Trimeton, others).

Allergic reactions have been known to cause mild-to-severe nausea and intestinal cramps, diarrhea, or swelling larger than 4 inches (about 10 centimeters) in diameter at the site, bigger than the size of a baseball. If you see anyone experiencing these symptoms after an insect bite or bee sting, medical attention beyond first aid is important, so know your emergency response contact information and routes to a medical facility.



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Workers should take the following steps to prevent insect stings:

- Wear light-colored, smooth-finished clothing.
- Avoid perfumed soaps, shampoos, and deodorants (Don't wear cologne or perfume and Avoid bananas and banana-scented toiletries.
- Wear clean clothing and bathe daily. (The odor of sweat has been known to agitate bees)
- Wear clothing to cover as much of the body as possible.
- Avoid flowering plants when possible.
- Keep work areas clean. Social wasps thrive in places where humans discard food.
- Remain calm and still if a single stinging insect is flying around. (Swatting at an insect may cause it to sting)
- Bees release a chemical when they sting, which may attract other bees, so try to get indoors or inside a vehicle. Knowledgeable persons state that shaded areas are better than open areas to get away from the insects.
- If you are able to physically move out of the area, do not to attempt to jump into water. Some insects (particularly Africanized Honey Bees) are known to hover above the water, continuing to sting once you surface for air.
- If a bee comes inside your vehicle, stop the car slowly, and open all the windows.
- Workers with a history of severe allergic reactions to insect bites or stings should consider carrying an epinephrine auto injector (EpiPen) and should wear a medical identification bracelet or necklace stating their allergy.

First aid kits need to be checked for completeness prior to going into a remote area while following the steps below when an insect bite or bee sting occurs:

- Have someone stay with the worker to be sure that they do not have an allergic reaction.
- Wash the site with soap and water.
- If a bee sting, remove the stinger immediately (if is visible in the wound). Look for a small black dot at the sting site. Many doctors recommend using a hard object like a credit card or blunt knife to swipe over the area and remove the stinger. Never squeeze the stinger or use tweezers. The honey bee venom sack, which remains in the skin of the victim, can take 2-3 minutes to release all of its venom, so prompt removal of the stinger can reduce the severity of the sting.
- Apply ice or a cold pack to reduce swelling.
- Do not scratch the sting as this may increase swelling, itching, and risk of infection.
- Taking an antihistamine such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) in tablet form and/or nonprescription pain relievers such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen can also provide relief of symptoms.

Stings in the mouth or nose, even in persons not known to be allergic to bee stings, also require emergency medical attention, since they can lead to swelling that can interfere with breathing.



Sometimes you lie in bed at night and you don't have a single thing to worry about- That *A/ways* Worries me!

Charlie Brown

