

## **Insect Bites – When do they become an emergency?**

Most of the time there is little to worry about when one is bitten or stung by an insect. These attacks often cause very few problems other than initial shock and pain.

However, the same bite on small children and those with allergies can be serious. Make sure to heed signs that the victim may need medical attention. Rapid inflammation and other adverse reactions to a bite or sting could be an indicator of an allergy. The best way to keep calm and handle the situation effectively is to know what common reactions look like, so it is possible to identify emergency situations.

### **Ants**

Even the most pristine summer day can be sullied by an ant bite. Thankfully most injuries caused by ant are only hurt at the time of the attack. In fact, the only species of ant that cause serious problems in the United States is the fire ant. This insect originally came from South America and is only found in the southern states.

Fire ants sting any creature that is seen as a threat to their colony and usually leave a blister that may itch. Since they have very potent venom, the area may in some cases swell. About 15% of people may have an allergic reaction to the venom and go into anaphylaxis. Though the severity of the reaction can vary, in the most serious cases the victim may have trouble breathing, form hives, and feel faint. Cramps, diarrhea, vomiting, runny nose, and anxiety are less common symptoms. Those who are experiencing this reaction should be taken to a doctor as soon as possible.

### **Bees and Wasps**

People who have been stung by a bee or wasp before know that though the sting can be very painful, it usually has no other adverse effects. In the case of a sting, remove the stinger immediately (in the case of a bee sting) and wash the infected area. A normal injury will be red and the area around it will swell, but some ibuprofen should virtually remove the pain and discomfort.

Being stung more than half a dozen times is always a concern. Multiple stings may cause serious reactions even in those who do not have an allergy. Children are especially susceptible to high doses of venom. Also, stings on the inside of the mouth or throat require immediate medical attention because they can swell and constrict the airway.

There are several symptoms that signal an allergic reaction for those who are unaware they have the allergy or cannot communicate the problem. Itching or hives in other places than the affected area are a tip off that the venom from the insect is traveling through the body. Problems breathing, difficulty swallowing, and faintness are all signs that the victim's body is swelling rapidly.

Those who have severe common reactions may keep a dose of adrenalin around in the form of an Epi-Pen, but even after the shot is administered they should be taken to the hospital.

### **Mosquitoes and Ticks**

Mosquito bites are mainly just a minor annoyance. Even those who are allergic to the bite may only experience uncomfortable swelling. A mosquito bite is never an emergency, but it can harbor dangerous diseases like West Nile virus and other types of encephalitis. Those infected will experience flu-like symptoms within a few days and should go see a doctor.

Ticks are found in wooded areas and tall grasses. They attach themselves onto animals and feed off of their blood. Most varieties of tick will leave no more than a small bite wound when removed, but the small deer tick can pass along Lyme disease to humans. Those who have been bitten by a tick will develop a bulls-eye rash or experience swelling if they have been infected and should seek treatment.

### **Spiders**

Though spiders are not insects, their bite can be cause for emergency medical treatment. Bites from spiders are rare because they are extremely defensive creatures that usually shy away from humans. About 2% of bites are any cause or concern and even less are considered emergencies.

Only two types of spiders found in the United States are fatal to humans. The black widow and brown recluse are easily identifiable. Within a few minutes of the bite the victim should be in intense pain. Those who are bitten by one of these spiders should go to the hospital immediately.

## Handling a Bite or Sting

Most bites or sting simply need to be washed with soap or water. In a few cases, cold should be applied to reduce swelling. If the victim has a known insect allergy, it may be a good idea to go to the hospital anyway. Those experiencing any severe reactions should be taken to the emergency room.

## About the Author

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