

#1-22

Bee and Wasp Stings

Extreme human sensitivity to stings resulting in serious or fatal reactions is confirmed almost entirely to cases involving bees, wasps, and hornets. Unlike most other allergies, insect allergy can cause a life-threatening disruption to breathing and circulatory systems called anaphylactic shock. For one person in 100, the sting of an insect can be fatal.

Allergic Reaction Symptoms. Most people stung will experience a "local" reaction with redness, pain, swelling and some itching only at the sting site. If the reaction progresses quickly to sites other than the sting site or is followed by difficult breathing or choking at the throat, the person is experiencing a "systemic" allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) requiring emergency medical treatment.

- Normal Reaction: Lasts a few hours. Sting site is painful, reddened, may swell and itch, but will quickly dissipate.
- Large Local Reaction: Lasts for days. Sting site is more painful, swelling and itching may be present both at the sting site and in surrounding areas.
- Severe Allergic Reaction: Can commence rapidly (in a few minutes) after the sting occurs. The whole body is involved. Person may feel dizzy (lightheaded), nauseated and weak. There may be stomach cramps and diarrhea. There can be itching around the eyes, a warm feeling or coughing, hives breaking out, followed with vomiting and swelling. There can be wheezing, difficult breathing (shortness of breath) or swallowing, hoarse speech, drop in blood pressure, shock, unconsciousness and darkened skin following. Reactions may occur in a few minutes with most deaths within 30 minutes, but some within 15 minutes and some in five minutes or less.

Stings. Whenever stung, try to capture or know the identity of the insect to help doctors diagnose the trouble. When a bee or wasp stings, it injects a venomous fluid under the skin. Honey bees have a barbed stinger. Only the honey bee leaves her stinger (with its venom sac attached) in the skin of its victim. Since it takes two to three minutes for the venom sac to inject all its venom, instant removal of the stinger and sac usually reduces harmful effects. Scrape away with a sideways movement (one quick scrape) with a fingernail. Never try to use the thumb and forefinger or tweezers to pinch out the stinger since this maneuver forces (injects) more venom from the sac down into the wound. Wasps, yellow-jackets and hornets have a lance-like stinger without barbs and can sting repeatedly. They should be brushed off the victim's skin promptly with deliberate movements, then quietly and immediately leave the area.



For stings causing itch, irritation, redness and swelling at the sting site, the following may be useful:

- Ice, baking soda, or meat tenderizer.
- Ammonia Solution – Apply a 1 to 2.5 percent solution no more than three to four times daily.
- Oral Antihistamines – Tablets may be chewed for faster relief, but liquids are more readily absorbed after oral ingestion (Chlortrimeton, Dimetane, Teldrin).
- Epinephrine Inhaler (Bronkaid mist, Primatene, Medihaler-Epi).

Take Away: Bee and wasp stings are a fairly common issue at clubs, particularly around the aquatics area and snack bars. Employees should be familiar with the symptoms of a severe reaction and how to treat stings.