



SAFETY UNLIMITED, INC.

Weekly Safety Meeting

Insect Bites and Stings

Bites and stings are a relatively common occurrence for people who work outdoors and in enclosed environments where bees and wasps, fire ants, insects and arachnids (spiders, scorpions, ticks and mites) feel at home.

Employers and workers are encouraged to understand exposure risks, how to recognize and respond to stings and bites, and what they can do to prevent them.

People with an allergy to stinging insects will want to take extra precautions this time of year. Up to 5 percent of Americans are at risk for a severe, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction from insect stings.

This may be fatal if not treated immediately. Symptoms of anaphylaxis to watch for include itching and hives over large areas of the body, separate or away from the site of the sting, swelling in the throat or tongue, difficulty breathing, dizziness, stomach cramps, nausea, and diarrhea. If you suffer from a stinging insect allergy, you should take extra precautions to avoid being stung.

Unfortunately, most people are not aware they are allergic to insect stings or bites until after experiencing a reaction. An allergic reaction occurs when the immune system overreacts to the insect venom.

Exposure Risk:

Thousands of people in the U.S. are stung or bitten each year. In a study of bite- and sting-related workplace fatalities and injuries that occurred from 1992-1997 in the U.S., 39 of 42 deaths were attributed to stings. During the same period, arachnids and insects inflicted 36,100 reported non-fatal occupational injuries and illnesses. Outdoor workers accounted for the majority of incidents.

Exposed arms and hands tend to be more susceptible to stings and bites among workers than legs and feet, which are usually protected by clothing and enclosed shoes. In the study of occupationally-related bites and stings, the head, one of the most exposed body parts, accounted for one-tenth of cases involving insects and arachnids; a third of those cases affected the eyes.

Bite- and sting-related injuries and fatalities may be underreported because severe illness and fatalities can be mistakenly diagnosed as heart attack or sunstroke, or attributed to other causes, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Symptoms and Treatment:

Venom from stings and bites often causes minor swelling, redness, pain, and itching. Reactions can vary from mild to severe. In rare cases, a bite or sting is potentially lethal for people who are highly allergic to the venom.

Emergency Response:

Bite and sting victims should be observed for severe allergic reaction. Symptoms such as coughing, trouble breathing, chest pain, severe sweating, confusion, nausea, vomiting, and hives require immediate emergency medical attention. If it's safe to do so, a bite or sting victim may be carefully moved to a protected or shaded area.

When assisting someone who has been bitten or stung, it's important to be aware of surroundings.

For example, stinging bees release a chemical that attracts more bees. Swarming fire ants become agitated and more aggressive.

If a spider or scorpion bite is suspected, an effective medical response can be expedited if a specimen can be collected or visually identified.

If the victim carries an epinephrine auto-injector (e.g., EpiPen, Auvi-Q) to treat an allergic attack, it may be necessary to assist with injecting the medication. This is usually done by pressing the auto-injector against the person's thigh and holding it in place for several seconds.

Other Steps in the Event of an Emergency:

- Loosen tight clothing and cover with a blanket.
- Do not give the person anything to drink.
- Turn the person on one side to prevent choking.
- Begin CPR if the person is unresponsive.

First Aid:

Most bites and stings will heal on their own with appropriate first aid and self-care. For an inflamed insect bite or sting, apply a wrapped ice pack for no more than 15 to 20 minutes an hour for the first six hours. When not using ice, keep a cool, wet cloth on the bite or sting for up to six hours. After the first six hours, if swelling is not present, warmth may be applied to the site for comfort.

The following may be used to help relieve pain and itching: antihistamine, local anesthetic spray, hydrocortisone cream (1%) or calamine lotion.

Under all circumstances, if considering the use of any type of over-the-counter remedy, carefully follow instructions and be certain it will not cause drowsiness or otherwise affect the ability to work safely. If unsure about medication effects, ask a prescribing clinician or pharmacist.

To help prevent a skin infection after a bite or sting, wash the area with soap and water and wipe it with rubbing alcohol or first-aid antiseptic.

Do not break any blisters. If a bite becomes irritated, apply a non-prescription antibiotic ointment and cover it with a bandage.

Signs of an infection that requires medical evaluation include increased pain, swelling, redness, warmth around the bite or sting, red streaks leading from the area, draining pus, and fever.

MAKE IT YOUR MISSION...NOT TO LIVE IN UNSAFE CONDITION!!

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