

*First Aid and Injury Prevention Series***Bee and Wasp Stings**

Preventing and Responding to Injuries Inflicted by Stinging Insects



During the spring and summer months, bees and wasps become much more common. As flowers bloom, various pollinator species gear into action, and finding them flying about is a common sight in many places. However, while these pollinators play an important role in maintaining the ecosystem, they also viciously protect themselves and their hives from any potential threats, and that includes humans! And while for many people, being stung once is merely painful, it can lead to serious injuries and illness in others. And multiple stings, such as from a swarm of insects, can be even more dangerous. The following health tip article will give you some advice from staying safe when dealing with bees and wasps, and how to treat stings.

This month's health tips are the last in a series. For this month and the past few months, we have been presenting you with common injuries you might encounter. This series will teach you the basics of how to lower your chances of these injuries, as well as some basic first aid so you can care for someone (or yourself) if you suffer these injuries. Please note that these health tips are for educational purposes only and are no replacement for a formal First Aid course or training. To find a First Aid class in your area so that you can be qualified and prepared to act in an emergency, see our Reference section below.

Prevention and Precautions

While it might not always be possible to avoid bees and wasps while outdoors, there are a few things you can do to keep yourself safe around stinging insects and reduce the chances of being stung. These include the following:

- Bees in particular prefer banana-scents, so avoid using banana-scented products before going outside.
- Any scented products (hand sanitizer, soap, perfume, cologne, deodorant, etc.) could also agitate bees and wasps, so avoid wearing scented versions of these products.
- Make sure to bathe or shower daily, as sweat can anger bees.
- Keep areas outside clean! Rotting food or food scraps can attract insects, including bees and wasps.
- Avoid working or playing too close to flowering plants, which might attract pollinators.
- Wear light-colored, smooth-finished clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
- If you're allergic, make sure to carry an EpiPen on hand.
- If you encounter a single bee or wasp, **don't panic**. Try to stay still and don't swat at it, since that will agitate the insect.
- If there is a bee or wasp in your car, bring the vehicle to a careful stop and roll down your windows until the bee or wasp leaves.
- If bees or wasps do begin to sting you, run away from the swarm if you can. Try to make for a shaded or indoor area.
- Know that certain insects (like bees) give off a chemical when they sting that attracts other insects of the same type, so leaving the area quickly is always recommended.
- Do **NOT** dive into water to avoid bees or wasps. Certain species of bees (such as Africanized honeybees) will wait for you to surface for air to continue stinging you.



Treating a Bee/Wasp Sting

Treating an insect sting is usually simple. Most insect stings lead to redness, pain, and swelling at the site of the sting. However, some people can experience very serious allergic reactions to insect stings, and the likelihood for serious problems goes up when stung multiple times or by multiple insects. When someone has been stung, you should do the following:

- Keep an eye on the person to watch for signs of a severe allergic reaction. Contact 911 if you notice the person experiencing these symptoms.
 - These signs can include the following:
 - swelling of the face, tongue, or throat,
 - difficulty breathing,
 - dizziness or fainting,
 - stomach cramps,
 - nausea,
 - diarrhea.
- Wash the site of the sting with soap and water.
- Use gauze or a hard, flat surface (like a nail or credit card) scraped carefully across the site of the sting to remove a stinger.
 - **DO NOT** pull out the stinger with tweezers or your fingers. This could squeeze the venom sack usually attached to the end of the stinger and expose the stung person to a higher dose of the insect's venom.
- Do not scratch the site of the sting, as it could cause damage and increase the chance of infection.
- Use ice to help reduce the swelling.
- Remove any tight-fitting rings and jewelry.
- Elevate the affected body part to help reduce swelling.
- You can use topical creams and antihistamines to help reduce swelling and redness but be aware if the person has any allergies to these medications. Also, remember that many antihistamines may cause drowsiness, which may make driving after taking these medications dangerous.



References

CPR/First Aid Training

American Heart Association - <https://cpr.heart.org/en>

American Red Cross – <https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class>

General References

NIOSH Fact Sheet for Stinging Insects - [cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-117/pdfs/2010-117.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-117/pdfs/2010-117.pdf)

NIOSH Fact Sheet for Bees and Wasps - [cdc.gov/niosh/topics/insects/beeswasphornets.html](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/insects/beeswasphornets.html)

OSHA Guidance on Bee Stings - [osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4137.pdf](https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4137.pdf)