Insect Sting Allergies Meeting Kits

INSECT STING ALLERGIES SAFETY TALK

There are many allergens that can cause an allergic reaction. One of the most common allergens and hardest to avoid is insect stings. According to the American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology, it has been estimated that potentially life-threatening allergic reactions to insect venom occur in 0.4 percent to 0.8 percent of children and 3 percent of adults.

STINGING INSECTS

Stinging insects have a sting (or stinger) at the posterior end of their abdomen. This group of insects includes honey bees, bumble bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets, and ants. However, many ants do not have stings. A couple of species that do have stings are army ants, found in the southern U.S., and harvester ants, found in the southern U.S. and western Canada.

If you are stung, it was a female insect that did it. In North America, yellow jacket wasps are involved in about 70% of the stings to humans. They are often mistaken for bees because of their yellow and black bodies. Most stinging insects can sting you more than once. One exception is the honey bee (worker bee) which has a barbed sting. When the worker bee escapes after stinging a person, the sting and attached venom sac are ripped out of the bee and stay in the victim´s skin; the bee will die afterwards.

WHERE YOU FIND THESE INSECTS

Nesting spots are often near these food sources.

- Inside hollow trees, or in walls, attic, etc. (the entrance is usually a very small hole).

- Nests that hang from branches or overhangs such as eaves of a building.
- In shrubs, bushes, hedges, or on tree limbs.
- In rubber tires, crates, boxes, abandoned vehicles, etc.
- Under shrubs, logs, piles of rocks.
- Inside rodent burrows or other holes in the ground.

HEALTH HAZARDS

Some insects do have a more toxic venom than others (such as the southern yellow jacket), while others are larger so they are able to carry more (but technically less toxic) venom (such as the Asian giant hornet).

Regardless, most people experience local effects like pain, swelling, itching, and redness around the sting site. Painful stings in the mouth and throat can result if you unintentionally swallowed a wasp or bee (e.g., drinking a soft drink from a can that a wasp had entered).

Some people will experience swelling in a larger area, not just immediately around the sting site. They may develop hives but no systemic effects (effects in the body away from sting site like effects on breathing and blood flow). This is a mild allergic reaction and can last a few days. The area will be sore and uncomfortable but one should not give in to the temptation to scratch the stung area.

Anaphylaxis

In rare cases, a severe allergic reaction can occur. This situation is serious and can cause ¨anaphylaxis¨ or anaphylactic shock. **Symptoms of anaphylaxis** can appear immediately (within minutes) or up to 30 minutes later.

- Hives, itching and swelling in areas other than the sting site.
- Swollen eyes and eyelids.
- Wheezing.
- Tightness in the chest and difficulty breathing.

- Hoarse voice or swelling of the tongue.
- Dizziness or sharp drop in blood pressure.
- Unconsciousness or cardiac arrest.

BEST PRACTICES: Before working on a site:

Check to see if there are any visible signs of activity or a hive or nest. If you see a number of insects flying around, check to see if they are entering/exiting from the same hole or place. If so, it is likely a nest or a source of food.

Wear long sleeve shirts, long pants, and closed-toed boots or shoes. If you cannot avoid working near bees or wasps, wear a bee-keepers style hat with netting to cover your head, neck and shoulders. Tape your pant legs to your boots/socks, and your sleeves to your gloves. You may also wish to wear an extra layer of clothing since wasp stings are long enough to reach through one layer of clothing.

If you find you are working near stinging insects, here are some tips.

- Most bees and wasps will not sting unless they are startled or attacked. Do not swat at them or make fast movements. The best option is to keep your distance, move away from the nest, or let the insects fly away on their own. If you must, walk away slowly, or gently ¨blow¨ them away. The only exception is if you have disturbed a nest and hear ¨wild¨ buzzing. Protect your face with your hands and run from the area immediately. Seek shelter in a closed vehicle or building, entering in a way to keep the insects outside.
- Wear light coloured clothes such as khakis, beige, or blue. Avoid brightly coloured, patterned, or black clothing.
- Tie back long hair to avoid bees or wasps from getting entangled in your hair.
- If you find a bee or wasp in your car, stop and leave the windows open. You may also take a thick cloth and cover the insect before it gets frightened. Carefully, let the insect back outside through an open window.

- Do not wear perfumes, colognes, scented soaps, or powders as

they contain fragrances that are attractive.

- Do not go barefoot or wear sandals, especially in areas where there is clover or other flowering plants that attract bees.

FINAL WORD

Most bees and wasps will not sting unless they are startled or attacked. Do not swat at them or make fast movement. The best option is to keep your distance, more away from the nest, or let the insects fly away on their own. If you must, walk away slowly, or gently “blow” them away. The only exception is if you have disturbed a nest and hear “wild” buzzing. Protect your face with your hands and run from the area immediately. Seek shelter in a closed vehicle or building, entering in a way to keep the insects outside.