



There's a Buzz in the Air

Approximately 5% of Americans are at risk for a severe, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction from stinging insects called anaphylaxis. Unfortunately, most people are not aware they are allergic to insect stings until after they experience a reaction. The most common insects that cause a reaction are: yellow jackets, honey bees, paper wasps, hornets and fire ants.

Symptoms of anaphylaxis include:

- Itching and hives all over the body
- Swelling of the throat or tongue
- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Stomach cramps
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Rapid fall in blood pressure, resulting in shock and loss of consciousness (severe cases)

Swelling, redness and warmth at the site of the sting alone does not constitute an anaphylactic reaction but does require observation and possible treatment.

Treatment:

Anaphylaxis is a medical emergency and can be fatal. If you or anyone else experiences any of the above symptoms after an insect sting, call 911. If an Epi-pen or Twin-ject is available it should be administered immediately. Proper care of an insect sting can ease the pain. Use the following tips to treat a non-anaphylactic sting:

- Elevate the affected area and apply ice or cold compress to reduce pain and swelling.
- Gently clean blisters with soap and water to prevent secondary infections; do not break the blisters.
- Use topical steroid ointments or oral antihistamines to relieve itching.
- Do not pinch the area to remove the stinger as this may release more venom.
- Monitor carefully for symptoms of anaphylaxis.

Preventing stings

You can take steps to protect yourself and others from being stung:

- Avoid the "territory" of the stinging insect's nest. Insects are more likely to sting if their homes are disturbed. Hire an exterminator to remove any hives or nests around your home.
- Remain calm and quiet, and slowly move away.

- Don't smell or look like a flower by avoiding brightly colored clothing and perfumes when outdoors.
- Be careful when cooking, eating or drinking sweet beverages like soda or juice outdoors. Keep food covered until eaten.
- Wear close-toe shoes outdoors and avoid going barefoot.
- Avoid loose-fitting garments that can trap insects between material and skin.

If you experience a severe reaction to insect stings or think you may be allergic, consult with an Asthma and Allergy Center clinician to accurately diagnose your condition. If you are diagnosed with an allergy to insect venom, venom immunotherapy may be recommended to decrease your sensitivity. Venom immunotherapy is 97% effective in preventing future allergic reactions.