

Everyday Safety Tailgate Talks

Bee Stings

As summer settles in across (Insert State), you're probably noticing that bees are especially active these days. It's their favorite season! And when they disappear as fall approaches, it will be time to be on alert for wasps and hornets.

Bees sting - leaving a stinger in your skin. Wasps don't leave a stinger, but their stings tend to cause worse reactions. In general, most stings only cause temporary pain, swelling and skin redness.

In more severe cases however, stings can have life-threatening effects, depending on where the sting occurs and what allergies you may have. Being stung in the throat for example, may cause fluid to build up and cause swelling in the tissues around the throat, making it difficult to breathe.

Although rare, the most severe allergic reaction to a sting is anaphylaxis (also called anaphylactic shock).

Of those people who die from a severe allergic reaction to a sting, half die within 30 minutes and three-quarters within 45 minutes. This reaction can occur the first time you are stung or with a subsequent sting.

Watch for these symptoms, which tend to appear immediately 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 Shock
- Unconsciousness or cardiac arrest

What precautions can you take?

Stay away. The best way to avoid getting stung is to avoid insects and be alert for hives or nests, or where insects are gathered, entering and exiting an opening. Stinging insects are also attracted to certain foods and may be found near garbage cans, dumpsters, and fallen fruit beneath fruit trees, pet food, and other sources of food residue.



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Avoid provoking the insects. Do not swat at them or make sudden movements. Let them fly away, slowly walk away, or gently “blow” away the insect. If you have disturbed a nest and hear wild buzzing, act quickly - protect your face with your hands and run from the area.

Power equipment such as mowers, weed eaters and chainsaws sometimes stir up the insects. If you are startled or stung while you are working with these power tools or machinery, you could end up getting injured with much more than a sting!

Let your supervisors know if you have allergies to insect stings, especially if you work outdoors. Co-workers should be trained in emergency first aid, be aware of the signs of a severe reaction, and know how to use the bee sting kit (self-injectable epinephrine). When working outside, carry a cellular phone in case you need emergency medical help.

Don't be a bug magnet. Reduce your chance of being stung by wearing light-colored clothes such as khaki, beige, or blue, and long sleeved shirts and long pants. Wear footwear to protect against bees and wasps attacking your bare or sandaled feet.

Avoid wearing scented, perfumed products, and make sure the insects can't hide or get tangled in your hair, or in the folds of clothing and towels. Be aware that insect repellent (“bug spray”) does not affect these stinging insects.

If you must be near bees or wasps, wear a hat with netting to cover your head, neck and shoulders and tape your pant legs to your boots and socks, and your sleeves to your gloves.

In the event of a sting, try removing the sting right away (the venom can still be injected for up to a minute afterwards) by scraping sideways with your fingernail or a credit card, at the narrow end of the sting.

You might have to use tweezers if the venom sac breaks off, leaving the sting in the skin. An application of ice (wrapped in a towel to prevent freezing the skin), anti-itch cream and/or an antihistamine pill can help reduce the effects of the sting.

Do not scratch a stung area. Scratching may cause a break in the skin, which could lead to an infection.

If you or a co-worker is stung in the eyes, nose or throat, or exhibit any sign of a reaction to a sting, call emergency medical services right away, even if you're not sure.

If you have experienced a severe allergic reaction to an insect sting in the past, expect a similar or worse reaction the next time. Ask your doctor to prescribe a bee sting kit and carry it with you at all times.

If you are hypersensitive to stings, you should also wear a medical alert bracelet. If you are ever stung multiple times, talk to your doctor; it might be wise to monitor your health over the next few days or weeks.

Resources and References:

Mayo Clinic Bee Sting Information Webpage

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bee-stings/symptoms-causes/syc-20353869>

