

When am I at risk for getting a bite or sting?

- Most stings happen in the summer or fall.
- Stinging insects in the U.S. are bees, yellow jackets, hornets, wasps, and fire ants.
- Insects are found near bushes, trees, and grass.
- Perfumes, hairsprays, scented lotions, and bright-colored clothes attract insects.

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What are normal reactions to a bite or sting?

- Reactions are different for everyone. Some reactions are worse than others.
- Most people aren't allergic to bites or stings.
- Normal reactions to a bite or sting are pain, swelling, and redness around the sting.
- More of the body than the stung area might swell. The whole arm might swell after a sting near the wrist.
- Swelling may last for 2 to 3 days.

How do you treat a normal reaction?

- If the stinger is left in the skin, do not squeeze the stinger or pull it out. This injects more venom in the skin and can make your reaction worse.
- Flick out the stinger by lifting it with a fingernail or scrape it off using the edge of a credit card.
- Disinfect the area. Keep it clean.
- You can use an over-the-counter antibiotic (such as Mycitracin Ointment) to prevent infection.
- Put ice on the area to bring down swelling.
- You can use an anti-inflammatory Ibuprofen (such as Motrin or Advil) to bring down swelling.
- Hydrocortisone cream (such as Cortaid 10) helps both itching and swelling.
- If swelling is uncomfortable, ask your doctor about using an antihistamine or steroids.
- Antibiotics will be needed if the sting gets infected.

What are allergic reactions to a bite or sting?

- Reactions can start within minutes to an hour after being stung.
- Reactions can cause hives (itchy, raised skin lumps) and itching.
- Areas of the body that weren't stung may swell or itch.
- The tongue could swell. The chest could be tight. It may be hard to breathe or swallow.
- People who are allergic to bites and stings may get "anaphylaxis." In this condition many different parts of the body have an allergic reaction at the same time.
- The person's blood pressure may drop and cause dizziness or fainting.
- The person's heart may stop beating or they may become unconscious.
- Allergic reactions could cause death.
- After one allergic reaction to a bite or sting, it is likely the next reaction will be the same or worse.

How do you treat an allergic reaction?

- Treat the bite or sting right away.
- An allergic reaction is treated with epinephrine given by shot.
- The doctor will teach you how to give yourself the shot (such as Epi-Pen). Always carry a two-pack with you, as a second injection may be necessary.
- Keep a two-pack (Epi-pen) at school and at home. Be sure to check the expiration date.
- GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM soon after getting stung in case you have an allergic reaction even after taking the shot.
- In some cases, intravenous fluids, oxygen, and other treatments may be needed.
- Allergic reactions can be prevented using special shots called venom immunotherapy. The venom helps your body prepare for an allergic reaction. Talk to your doctor for more information.

What can I do to avoid getting a bite or sting?

- Be careful in places where stinging insects are found, especially at picnics or around open garbage cans.
- Wear shoes when walking through the grass.
- If your skin is covered, you are less likely to get stung.
- Keep a safe distance from hives and nests. Have someone remove hives and nests near your home.

When should I call the doctor?

- GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM if you think you're having an allergic reaction.
- After 24 hours, call the doctor if you notice pus around the stung area or swelling and redness have increased.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your reaction to a bite or sting.

Quick Answers

- Most stings happen in the summer or fall.
- Normal reactions to a bite or sting are pain, swelling, and redness around the sting.
- Flick out the stinger. Disinfect the area. Put ice on it to bring down swelling.
- Allergic reactions can cause swelling, hives, and difficulty breathing.
- An allergic reaction is treated with epinephrine given by shot.
- Go to the emergency room if you have an allergic reaction or call the doctor if you have concerns about a normal reaction.

References

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- MedicineNet.com. Stinging Insect Allergies (Bee Stings, Wasp Stings, Others). 1996-2001 (cited 2001 August 2). URL: <http://www.medicinenet.com/Script/Main?Art.asp?li=MNI&ArticleKey=227&page=1>