

[Insect stings: If you've never had a bad reaction it doesn't mean you won't](#)

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - To many, pesky bee stings typically only cause temporary throbbing. That doesn't mean you'll never have a bad reaction. Public health officials warn that having one type of reaction after a sting doesn't mean a person will always have the same reaction next time.

While it's crucial for people who've had an allergic response to avoid the insect of concern, a previously non-reactive person can develop sensitivity at any time. Insect stings can cause different symptoms, ranging from brief pain to a severe allergic reaction. First-aid kits should contain an antihistamine to help prepare for an unexpected serious reaction to a bite or sting.

There are several steps one can take to lower the risk of bee, hornet, wasp and other insect stings:

? Avoid insect encounters: slowly move away; don't wave your arms or swat at them.

? Cover exposed skin and wear shoes.

? Don't use products with strong perfumes such as soaps, shampoos, and deodorants; they can attract insects.

? Avoid wearing bright colors or flower-patterned clothing.

? Watch out for insects around flowers, outdoor areas where food is served, and garbage and compost areas. Remove fallen fruit in your garden, and keep a well-fitting lid on your garbage can.

? Never disturb insect nests. Arrange to have a nest removed by a professional pest control service if it's in or near your home.

? Keep food and drinks covered when outside. Meats and sugary drinks attract wasps and bees. Both can get into open bottles or cans that you're drinking from.

Insect stings typically don't require a visit to a doctor. However, call 911 if you're having any symptoms that suggest a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis). Signs of anaphylaxis include skin reactions in parts of the body other than the sting area. Hives, itching, and flushed or pale skin are almost always present. People may also have difficulty breathing; swelling of the throat and tongue; a weak and rapid pulse; nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea; dizziness or fainting; or a loss of consciousness. Any of these symptoms should be treated as a medical emergency.

If you have a prescribed epinephrine injector (EpiPen, Twinject), use it immediately as directed by your health care provider. And get medical care immediately if you've been swarmed by bees and have been stung multiple times. This is especially important for children, older adults, and people who have breathing or heart problems.

Remember, most insects are usually not aggressive and play a very beneficial role in nature. By taking a few precautions most stings can be avoided.

The Department of Health website has more information about avoiding insect stings and the role of insects in our lives. The Mayo Clinic website also has information on symptoms and treatment of insect stings.