

Tip Sheets

Insect Sting Allergies



When an individual is stung by an insect, venom is injected into the skin which causes an allergic reaction in some individuals.

Allergic reactions to insect stings can suddenly occur in an individual who has previously been stung and did not have an allergic reaction.

The most common stings that produce allergic reactions are:

- Honeybees
- Hornets
- Wasps
- Yellow jackets
- Fire ants

Although most people are not allergic to insect venom, people do sometimes confuse a normal reaction to an insect sting with an allergic reaction.

There are three types of reactions that can occur following an insect sting.

1. The first is a *normal reaction* of pain with swelling and redness on the area of the body that was stung.
2. Swelling beyond the sting site is referred to as a *large location reaction* and is the second type of reaction. This swelling can last several days.
3. The third and most serious type of reaction is a *systemic reaction*. This type of reaction requires the seeking of medical attention. Symptoms of a *systemic reaction* can range from mild to severe and include the following:
 - Hives (at the site of the sting)
 - Itchiness
 - Becoming flushed

- Swelling in other areas of the body where the sting did not occur
- Dizziness due to a sudden drop in blood pressure
- Hoarse voice, swelling of the tongue and/or difficulty swallowing
- Hives in other areas of the body
- Stomach cramping, vomiting, nausea, diarrhea
- Loss of consciousness
- Cardiac arrest

The most severe reaction to an allergen is anaphylaxis which is a potentially life-threatening reaction that can impact an individual's breathing, blood pressure and cause the body to go into shock.

Individuals who are at risk of having an anaphylactic reaction to an insect sting carry with them what is often referred to as an EpiPen®. An EpiPen® is a pen-like device that automatically injects epinephrine into the body. Epinephrine is a chemical that narrows the blood vessels and opens the airways in the lungs. An emergency response team should be called following any administration of epinephrine.

Additional Resources for Information on Children with Insect Sting Allergies:

American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
<http://acaai.org/allergies/types/skin-allergies/latex-allergy>

Caring for Our Children, 3rd Edition
<http://cfoc.nrckids.org/>

Health Care Information, Plans and Forms
California Child Care Health Programs
<http://cchp.ucsf.edu/>

For more information on children with special health care needs, visit
www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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