

# Insect, Spider, and Scorpion Bites and Stings



Most insect bites are harmless. They may cause only minor swelling or itching. But if you're allergic to insects such as wasps or bees, a sting can be life-threatening.. Some ticks can carry and spread serious diseases. The venom (poison) from scorpions and certain spiders can also be deadly, but this is rare. Knowing when to seek emergency care could save your life.



## When to go to the emergency room (ER)

Go to the nearest emergency room if you have any of the following:

- Scorpion sting
- Bite from a black, red, or brown widow spider or brown recluse spider
- Severe pain or swelling at the site of bite
- A tick that is embedded in your skin and can't be easily removed at home
- Signs of an allergic reaction such as:
  - Hives
  - Swelling of your eyes, lips, or the inside of your throat
  - Trouble breathing
  - Dizziness or confusion

## What to expect in the ER

- If you're having trouble breathing, you'll be given oxygen through a mask. In severe cases, you may have a tube inserted in your throat and be placed on a breathing machine (ventilator).

- If you are having a severe allergic reaction from a sting (anaphylaxis), you may be given a shot of epinephrine. If it's known that you are allergic to bee or wasp stings, your healthcare provider may give you a prescription for an autoinjector that you can keep with you at all times in case of a sting.
- You may get antivenin (a substance that reverses the effects of poison) for some spider bites and scorpion stings. Because antivenin can sometimes cause other problems, your healthcare provider will weigh the risks and benefits of this treatment.
- Steroids such as prednisone are often used to treat allergic reactions. In many cases, an antihistamine to help relieve itching may also be prescribed. These are to be taken for several days to relieve symptoms and make sure the allergic reaction doesn't recur.

## Home care

- Try to remove an insect stinger you can see. Use your fingernail, a knife edge, or credit card to scrape against the skin. Don't squeeze or pull.
- Keep the area clean and dry.
- Apply ice or a cold compress to reduce pain and swelling. Keep a thin cloth between the cold source and the skin.
- You may use over-the-counter pain medicine to control pain, unless another pain medicine was prescribed. Talk with your healthcare provider before using acetaminophen or ibuprofen if you have chronic liver or kidney disease. Also talk with your doctor if you have ever had a stomach ulcer or digestive bleeding.
- Watch for worsening symptoms or signs of an allergic reaction (see above).

## When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of these occur:

- Spreading areas of redness or swelling
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Increasing pain, redness, swelling, or drainage
- Headache, weakness, chills, muscle spasms, muscle or joint aching, or vomiting
- New rash

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