

First Aid for Insect Bites & Bee Stings

Most insect bites and bee stings cause pain, redness, and swelling but are not life-threatening. Keep the person calm, remove the stinger if present, and follow the steps below. Watch carefully for signs of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) such as difficulty breathing, swelling of the face or throat, or fainting — treat as an emergency.

⚠ Common Causes & Insects

- Bees, wasps, hornets (stings)
- Mosquitoes, midges, and sandflies (bites)
- Ticks (may transmit infections)
- Spiders (some species can cause more severe reactions)
- Ants (including fire ants — painful bites/stings)





What to Do After a Sting or Bite

- Move to a safe area to avoid more stings (e.g., away from a nest).
- If a bee stinger is visible, remove it quickly by scraping with a flat edge (credit card) — avoid squeezing.
- Wash the area with soap and water to reduce infection risk.
- Apply a cold compress or ice pack (wrapped) for 10–15 minutes to reduce pain and swelling.
- Give an oral antihistamine for itching if appropriate (and not contraindicated).

What NOT to Do

- Do not use tweezers to pinch a stinger — this can squeeze more venom.
- Do not apply heat — cold is preferred to reduce swelling and pain.
- Do not cut into the bite or attempt to suck out venom.
- Avoid giving aspirin to children for bite-related symptoms unless instructed by a doctor.





When to Seek Medical Help

- If signs of anaphylaxis appear: difficulty breathing, swelling of face/throat, rapid heartbeat, fainting — call emergency services immediately.
- If the sting/bite is on the mouth or throat (risk of swelling and airway obstruction).
- If there are many stings or the person is a child, elderly, or pregnant.
- If redness, warmth, increasing pain or pus develops — possible infection.
- If a tick is attached and you cannot remove it fully — or if fever, rash, or flu-like symptoms develop later.

Preventing Bites & Stings

Simple precautions can greatly reduce the risk of insect bites and stings. Use protective measures when outdoors and keep living areas free of nests and standing water.

Clothing & Repellents

- Wear long sleeves and trousers when in wooded or marshy areas.
- Use insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 on exposed skin following label instructions.
- Tuck socks into trousers and treat clothing with permethrin where needed (for ticks).
- Avoid wearing bright floral scents or perfumes that attract insects.





Home & Environmental Tips

- Remove standing water where mosquitoes breed and seal trash bins to deter wasps.
- Keep windows and doors screened and repair holes in screens.
- Call pest control for nests close to living areas (wasps, hornets).
- Check your body and clothing for ticks after outdoor activities.

Children & Special Precautions

- Supervise children near flowering plants and food where bees gather.
- Keep an emergency action plan if a child has a known allergy (epipen available).
- Teach children to remain calm and still if a bee lands on them — sudden movements can trigger stings.



Treatment & Medication

Medicines can help reduce itching and swelling after bites and stings; they do not remove venom already injected but can improve comfort.

What May Help

- Oral antihistamines (e.g., cetirizine or loratadine) can reduce itching and allergic symptoms; follow dosing instructions.
- Topical steroid creams (hydrocortisone) for localized itching and inflammation.
- Pain relievers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain relief if appropriate.
- If someone has a known severe allergy, give epinephrine (EpiPen) immediately and call emergency services.