

Fire ants, bees, wasps, and hornets can be a nuisance, especially for outdoor workers, and they may sting if they are disturbed.

- Most people have mild reactions to insect bites and stings, and they may experience redness, itching, stinging, or minor swelling on their skin.
- For some people insect bites and stings can cause a severe allergic reaction which can be life-threatening.



This safety topic provides basic first aid safety tips for **insect stings, with specific information provided about fire ants, bees, wasps, and hornets.**

First aid should be administered only by trained and authorized personnel who are able to provide a primary assessment and basic medical aid using accessible supplies.

The information provided in this safety topic is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice or formal first aid training.

To provide first aid for an insect sting that causes a mild reaction:

- Move to a safe area to avoid more bites or stings.
- If present, remove the stinger.
- Wash the area with soap and water.
- Apply a cool compress. Use a cloth dampened with cold water or filled with ice. This helps reduce pain and swelling.
- If the sting happens on an arm or leg, keep it raised to help reduce swelling.
- Apply 0.5% or 1% hydrocortisone cream, calamine lotion, or a baking soda paste to the bite or sting site several times daily until the symptoms go away.
- Take an over-the-counter antihistamine (like Benadryl) to reduce itching.
- To avoid infection, keep the area clean and try not to scratch.



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- Usually, the signs and symptoms of insect sting disappear in a day or two.
- If you're concerned, even if the reaction is minor, call your doctor or seek medical care.
- Antihistamines may cause drowsiness, which could create a safety concern for employees returning to work that day.

After an insect bite or sting, if any of the following symptoms appear, call 911 or seek emergency medical care immediately.

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain or rapid heartbeat
- Swelling of the lips, eyelids, or throat
- Dizziness or fainting
- Confusion or slurred speech
- Hives or serious swelling on the skin
- Nausea, cramps, or vomiting



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If there is an allergic reaction, take these actions immediately while waiting for medical help:

- Ask the person if they are carrying an epinephrine autoinjector (like an EpiPen).
- If the person says they need to use an autoinjector, ask whether you should help inject the medication. This is usually done by pressing the autoinjector against the person's thigh and holding it in place for several seconds.
- Loosen tight clothing and cover them with a blanket. Don't give them anything to drink.
- If the person is vomiting, position them to prevent choking.
- Trained personnel can begin CPR if the person shows no signs of circulation, such as breathing, coughing, or movement.

Fire ants bite the skin and hold on until the ant's stinger injects the venom. After inflicting the first sting, it may remove the stinger and, rotating or pivoting around its head, may sting several more times, leaving a circular pattern of sting sites.

- Briskly brush fire ants off the skin and clothes by hand or with a cloth. Because of their tight grip on the skin, jumping into water or using water to remove them may not be effective.
- Red bumps may form at the sting sites and can then become white fluid-filled pustules.

Treat mild fire ant sting reactions by washing the affected area with soap and water and then covering with a bandage.

- Applying ice can reduce the pain.
- Over-the-counter steroid creams and antihistamines can be used to reduce pain and itch.

Fire ant sting and bite marks should go away in about a week but scratching the skin can cause the affected area to become infected, which can make the irritation last longer.

- Keep the area clean and try not to scratch.



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Fire ants can cause an allergic reaction in some people, which can be fatal if not treated right away.

- If symptoms appear that may indicate an allergic reaction, like difficulty breathing, nausea, swelling, dizziness, severe sweating, or slurred speech, call 911 or seek emergency medical care immediately.

When a honeybee stings, its stinger, the venom sac, and other parts of the bee's body are pulled out and left behind, killing the bee.

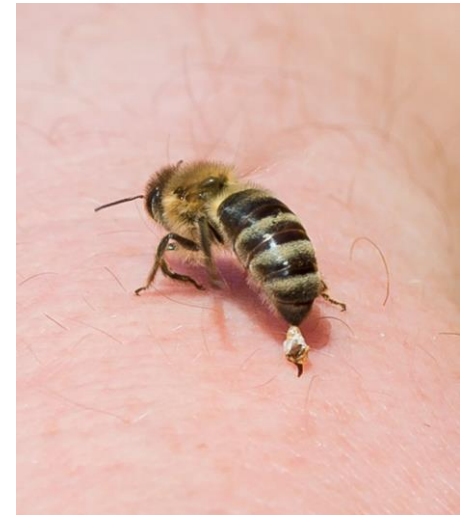
- Other bees are typically docile but are capable of stinging multiple times if they are aggravated.
- Wasps and hornets can sting once or multiple times.

Bee stingers should be removed as soon as possible since the venom sac remains attached and can continue injecting venom.

- Remove the stinger using gauze wiped over the area or by scraping with a fingernail or other straight-edged object such as a credit card.
- Do not squeeze the stinger or use tweezers in an attempt to remove it as this may release more venom.

After a bee, wasp, or hornet sting:

- Wash the skin with soap and water, or clean with antiseptic towelettes.
- Apply a cold compress or ice pack wrapped in a thin cloth to help reduce swelling and pain.
- If the sting happens on an arm or leg, keep it raised to help reduce swelling.
- Localized swelling and itching can be treated with over-the-counter pain relievers, steroid creams, anesthetic sprays, or oral antihistamines.
- If symptoms appear that may indicate an allergic reaction, like difficulty breathing, nausea, swelling, dizziness, nausea, or hives over larger areas of the body, call 911 or seek emergency medical care immediately.



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