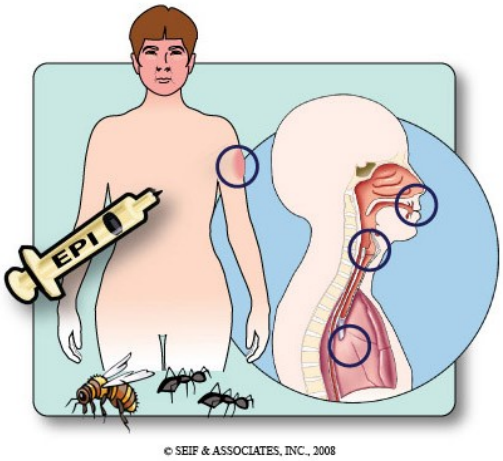
Insect Sting Allergies

Honeybees, bumblebees, yellow jackets, hornets, wasps, fire ants, and harvester ants are common causes of insect stings. Stinging insect nests can be found in various places, including overhangs, the hollow of trees, or in the ground. Insect sting reactions can range from mild to life-threatening anaphylactic reactions.



Symptoms of an allergic reaction usually occur within minutes of the insect sting. They may begin as late as 20 minutes after the sting. It is not uncommon for stings to cause immediate pain. Some people say it feels like a hot wire was placed on their skin at the sting site. Others have pain followed by swelling and itching.

COMMON SIGNS/SYMPTOMS OF A REACTION INCLUDE:

Any or all of the following:

- Hives
- Diarrhea and stomach cramps.
- Wheezing and difficulty breathing.
- Difficulty swallowing, throat tightness/closing.
- Loss of consciousness (fainting).
- Dizziness
- Itching & swelling (of any body part).
- Vomiting
- Coughing
- Red/watery eyes.
- Sense of doom.
- Change of voice/color.

Local reactions typically are found at the site of the sting and cause painful swelling and itching. The symptoms usually disappear within a few hours.

- Some local reactions can involve swelling of an area larger than the sting site. For example, the entire arm can become swollen from a sting on the hand. Swelling may last as long as 10 days, although it usually peaks within 2 days. This type of reaction may also include nausea and low-grade fever.
- A systemic reaction can involve difficulty breathing, fainting, or loss of consciousness.

FOLLOW-UP CARE

- **As soon as possible**, consult with an allergist to try to find the cause of your reaction and receive necessary prescriptions. To locate an allergist near you, contact:
  - The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology [www.aaaai.org] or
  - The American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology [www.acaai.org].
- If prescribed, carry your injectable epinephrine (EpiPen®) at all times! Learn how to use the device and make sure family members know how to use it.
- Avoid contact with stinging insects.
- Wear a medical identification bracelet or necklace (such as the one offered by MedicAlert®) noting your allergy.
- Make sure that your primary care physician has a record of your allergic reaction.
- Consult educational resources provided by The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN), a nonprofit organization [www.foodallergy.org].
- If you experience a subsequent allergic reaction, administer epinephrine promptly and call your local emergency services (911 if in U.S.).

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION OR CALL EMERGENCY SERVICE IF:

You have symptoms of an allergic reaction which are:

- Wheezing.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Chest pain, lightheadedness or fainting.

- Raised red patches on the skin that itch.
- Nausea, vomiting, cramping or diarrhea.
- **These may be early signs of a serious generalized or anaphylactic reaction. Have someone else drive you or call your local emergency services (911 if in U.S.) for an ambulance.**

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