

## :: Insect Stings ::

With the advent of warmer weather comes a problem that has plagued humans from their beginning—insect stings! There are many kinds of stinging insects around Pennsylvania, but some of the most common types of stings are those that occur from hymenoptera (yellow jackets, hornets, wasps and bees). Sometimes you can get stung just sitting outside eating your lunch, while driving your car or while working inside a building. It just seems that warmer weather brings out the “little nasties” and many of them can, and will, sting you without too much warning.

Most people have a localized reaction to insect stings (redness, pain, swelling, itching or burning at the site) making the sting an aggravation. However, when you are hypersensitive or allergic to the sting, it becomes an emergency situation. For 50 to 100 people each year, an insect sting causes a sudden drop in blood pressure, shock and death. This is called anaphylactic shock. In addition, many people suffer significant reactions from stings that do not result in death.

### **Important things to remember about insect stings:**

- If you're not sure, see your physician to find out if you may be allergic to insect stings. If your doctor cannot perform the necessary testing, he/she can refer you to a specialist who can.
- If you have an allergy to insect stings, obtain an emergency bracelet to alert emergency personnel and others.
- Check with your physician for the most appropriate method of treatment for you before you're stung.
- If you are allergic to insect stings, ask your physician about how you can obtain an “emergency bee sting kit” and ensure you receive the necessary training on how to use it. Additionally, make sure you keep it with you and let coworkers and others know where it is.
- If you do get stung and are hypersensitive/allergic to stings, you may experience one or all of the following: difficulty breathing, swelling of the face and lips, hives, itching, bronchial restriction, diarrhea, abdominal cramps or drop in blood pressure.

- If you are not able to inject yourself, the “EpiPen” may be easier to use and may require less training.

### **If a coworker is allergic to stings:**

- Call emergency medical services immediately!
- Usually the medication in the bee sting kit is short-acting, so the victim needs to be transferred to a medical facility as soon as possible.
- After a sting, don't try to pull out the stinger (if there is one) – scrape it away with a fingernail or credit card to avoid squeezing out more venom.
- Application of ice helps reduce pain and swelling.

### **Some common-sense precautions to help prevent getting stung:**

- Persons with hypersensitivity or allergic reactions to insect stings should not be alone when involved in outdoor activities since they may need immediate help in initiating emergency treatment measures.
- If you encounter a stinging insect, move away slowly. It is looking for pollen, food or water. It will probably not attack unless provoked. Slapping at it or making any quick movements increases the chance of a sting.
- Wear shoes when walking through low-lying flowers such as clover.
- Wear close fitting clothing that won't trap an insect.
- Light-colored clothing, floral prints, sweet smelling cosmetics and colognes or after shaves may attract an insect looking for pollen.
- Garbage cans and recycling containers should be kept covered.

Even though warmer months can bring on different types of insects, and some of them can sting, using common sense and forethought can help you enjoy the weather without being stung.