



Bites and Stings

Only female mosquitos bite—while male mosquitos feast on plants, females require blood in order to lay eggs.

As you plan for summer picnics, hiking, camping and other outdoor activities, be prepared for encountering bugs. Here are some tips on how to recognize, treat and avoid common bug bites and stings.

Identifying Bites and Stings

Knowing what certain bugs' bites and stings look like can help you treat them more effectively.

- Bees and wasps—The site of a bee or wasp sting will be red, swollen, and possibly painful or itchy. Wasps sting multiple times, while bees sting only once, leaving their stingers behind. If you are stung by a bee, remove the stinger carefully with a scraping motion to avoid injecting further venom, then disinfect the area. To reduce swelling, apply ice. Acetaminophen can be used to reduce the pain.
- Ants—Ant stings produce itchy lumps, followed by blisters within a few hours. Disinfect the area, and to avoid a bacterial infection, do not break the blister. Oral antihistamines or cortisone creams will reduce itching.
- Mosquitoes—Mosquito bites cause red, itchy bumps. To relieve the itching, apply calamine lotion. For severe swelling, take an oral antihistamine.
- Ticks—Ticks are often embedded in the skin. If a tick is no longer present, the area around the bite may be red. After spending time in wooded areas, thoroughly check yourself for ticks. To remove a tick, place tweezers at its head where it is attached to the skin and gently pull. Disinfect the area. In some regions, ticks may transmit Lyme disease. It is also important to check your pets for ticks after they have been outside. Save the tick in a jar for several weeks so that you can bring it to the doctor or vet if you or your pet become ill.

Seeking Medical Attention

If you exhibit any of the following symptoms, call your doctor immediately:

- Swelling larger than two inches in diameter around the bite site
- Swelling of the face, tongue or throat
- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain or heart palpitations
- Joint pain
- Muscle stiffness or spasms
- Rash or hives
- Fever, nausea or vomiting
- Severe headaches

Preventing Bites and Stings

The following tactics can be used to avoid bites and stings:

- Limit exposure to high-risk environments such as marshes, stagnant water and heavily wooded areas.
- Avoid outdoor activity during peak mosquito times (dawn, dusk or after a heavy rain).
- Wear light-colored protective clothing such as long pants, long-sleeve shirts, socks and shoes.
- Use caution when drinking from open beverage containers, and keep food covered to avoid ant, bee and wasp stings.
- Keep window screens in good repair.
- Use insect repellent. Be sure to follow directions carefully, especially for use on children.