



Insect Sting Allergies

It seems like the warm weather is finally here! But as you spend more time outside, you might be noticing more bees visiting your yard. Not only are bee and other insect stings painful, but they can cause severe allergic reactions as well. The good news is there is a treatment for allergies to insect stings!

What stinging insects are known to cause allergic reactions?

- Yellow jackets
- Hornets
- Wasps
- Honeybees
- Imported Fire Ants

What are some ways to identify the stinging insect?

Yellow Jacket	Nests usually underground. Very aggressive. Can leave stinger attached to skin. Most common cause of insect sting reactions.
Hornet	Nests usually in bushes and trees. Also very aggressive.
Wasps	Honeycomb nests in shrubs, under eaves of house, in pipes on playground.
Honeybee	Hives in trees and buildings. Less aggressive. Usually leave stinger attached to skin.
Imported Fire Ant	Build large nests in soil. Sting develops into pustule. Usually stings multiple times. More common in southeast United States.

Insect stings are very common. Up to 94% of the adult population in the US reports being stung at least one time.

What are the symptoms of an allergic reaction to stinging insects?

Reactions to stings are classified as either local or systemic reactions. Local reactions usually consist of a large area of redness, swelling, and itching around the sting bite. Swelling usually increases over the 24-48 hours after the sting, and improves after 3-10 days. Systemic reactions range from mild to severe, including anaphylaxis. Symptoms can include itching, hives, nausea, diarrhea, wheezing, or fainting.

About 10% of the population in the US have large local reactions to insect stings and about 3% have systemic reactions.

How do you test for allergy to insect stings?

- Skin prick testing – this can be done in the office
- Blood test – often used in addition to skin prick testing

What is the treatment for insect sting allergy?

- Minimize risk – wear shoes outside, wear long pants and long sleeves when working outside, avoid picnic areas, be careful drinking from straws and containers when outside.
- Carry epinephrine autoinjector (Epipen/Auvi-Q) if appropriate.
- Venom Immunotherapy – These are allergy shots for insect stings. They are recommended for all patients with a history of anaphylaxis to insect stings. **Allergy shots are very effective. They reduce the risk of a systemic reaction from a future sting down to 5% (compared to 60% if untreated)!**

If you have a history of possible allergic reaction to insect stings or any questions about insect sting allergy, please call our office or schedule an appointment online.

Riverdale office: 973-248-9199
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