

Patient Information on Allergic Reactions to Stings by Hornets, Yellow Jackets, Wasps and Bees

Are you one of the millions of Canadians who are stung by insects every year? Everyone will react in some way to the venom of stinging insects but about 5% of the population are "truly allergic" or anaphylactic.

Types of Sting Reactions

The severity of an insect sting reaction varies from person to person. A normal reaction will result in pain, swelling and redness confined to the sting site. Simply disinfect the area and apply ice to reduce the swelling. A large local reaction will result in swelling that extends beyond the sting site. For example, a person stung on the forearm may have the entire arm swell to twice its normal size. Although alarming in appearance, this condition is often treated the same way as a normal reaction. However, because this condition may persist for 2-3 days, antihistamines and steroids are sometimes prescribed to lessen the discomfort. The most serious reaction to an insect sting is a true allergic one - anaphylaxis. This condition requires immediate medical attention. Symptoms of an allergic reaction or anaphylaxis may include one or more of the following:

- Hives, itching, or swelling in areas other than the sting site
- Tightness in the chest and difficulty breathing
- Hoarse voice or swelling of the tongue and throat
- Dizziness or a sharp drop in blood pressure
- Unconsciousness or cardiac arrest

This type of reaction can occur within minutes after the sting, be life threatening or even fatal. People who have experienced an allergic reaction to an insect sting have a 60% chance of a similar or worse reaction if stung again.



Treating Anaphylaxis

An allergic reaction is treated with epinephrine, either self-injected or administered by a doctor. In some cases intravenous fluids, oxygen and other treatments are necessary as well. Patients are required to stay for at least 8 hours or overnight at the hospital under close supervision. People who have had a previous reaction and rely on the protection of epinephrine must remember to carry it with them wherever they go. Immediate medical attention following an insect sting is recommended, as one dose may be insufficient in reversing a reaction.

Avoidance

You can lessen your chances of an insect sting by taking certain precautions. Yellow Jackets nest in the ground and in walls. Hornets will nest in bushes and in trees. Use extreme caution when working or playing in these areas and never walk barefoot on the lawn. Avoid insect attractants such as bright clothing, fragrances, perfumes, hair-sprays, lotions, open garbage cans and exposed food at picnics. Also, try to reduce the amount of exposed skin when outdoors.

Allergy Canada Ltd supplies allergists with the most accurate diagnostic material available and has proven Venom Immunotherapy available to treat and protect patients.

Preventing Reactions

Allergic reactions to insect stings can be prevented with venom immunotherapy, a treatment which is 97% effective in preventing future occurrences. It involves administering gradually increasing doses of venom which stimulates the patient's own immune system to become resistant to a future allergic reaction. Over time, people who previously lived under the constant threat of severe reaction to insect stings can go about leading normal lives.

Finding Out More About Venom Immunotherapy

If you have had an allergic reaction, it's important to be evaluated by an allergist, a doctor who is a specialist in the diagnosis and treatment of allergic disease. Based on your past history and venom testing, the allergist will be able to determine if you are a candidate for the immunotherapy treatment. The prescription is then sent to Allergy Canada Ltd.

Conclusion

Most people are not allergic to insect stings and should recognize the difference between an allergic reaction and a normal or large local reaction. This will prevent unnecessary worry and medical expense. People who are allergic to insect stings should be evaluated by an allergist for correct diagnosis and treatment of their allergic condition. Although stinging insect allergy is a serious problem, much of the risk and fear of a reoccurrence can be eliminated with immunotherapy.



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