

# Going outside? Prepare to prevent bug bites and stings

By Eric Hjaltalin

The vast majority of insect bites and stings are not dangerous. But it's important to know what reactions, symptoms or changes should be evaluated by a medical professional and which ones can be cared for at home.

Pain is a common reaction to bites or stings. For many insects, the bite or sting itself causes sudden, sharp pain that only lasts for seconds to minutes. Pain that is not rapidly improving is probably caused by venom left behind as a result of the sting or bite. This can be very painful depending on the insect, but is generally not going to be permanently harmful. If you ever feel the pain is too much, please seek out medical evaluation.

## **Allergic reactions**

For some people, the first time they are stung by a bee is the day they find out about their deadly allergy to bee venom. If you or a person you know is bitten or stung by an insect, call 911 and seek emergency medical care immediately if any of these symptoms develop: difficulty breathing, passing out, swelling of the tongue, mouth or face or trouble swallowing.

## **Infections**

If your bites or stings start to develop drainage of foul-smelling material, worsening redness or pain, get evaluated by your regular physician or a walk-in clinic for possible bacterial infection.

Mosquito bites can transmit West Nile Virus. Last year, 44 cases of West Nile were reported among Montanans, including 23 cases of serious neurological illness and one death, according to the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. Initial symptoms may include fever, headaches, joint pain or vomiting. West Nile virus is a serious reason to take precautions against mosquito bites.

## **Basic Home Care**

After a bite or sting, look to see whether a stinger or other part of the insect is still attached to you. If so, use a clean fingernail or tweezers to remove it. Wash the area with antibacterial soap and warm water. If a wound is visible, apply a small amount of over-the-counter antibiotic ointment.

To help relieve itching from insect bites, moisturize the bite area with your moisturizer of choice, calamine lotion or menthol-containing ointments or lotions. Topical Benadryl (diphenhydramine) or ice may help. For pain, try ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

## **Tick tips**

Ticks in Montana can transmit diseases. Check yourself, your children, pets and gear for ticks after you have been outdoors in the spring, summer and fall.

Ticks should be removed immediately. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends using a clean, fine-tipped tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin's surface as possible. Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Don't twist or jerk the tick; that can cause the mouth-parts to break off and remain in the skin. If this happens, remove the mouth-parts with tweezers. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol or soap and water.

If a person bitten by a tick develops a fever or rash days or weeks later, they should get medical attention for possible tick-borne disease.

### **Preventing bites**

The best bug bite and sting strategy is prevention. If you are going outside where insects are present, apply an insect repellent containing DEET for everyone in your family over two months of age. Reapply frequently, especially if you are getting into and out of water. Cover up by wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Be aware that mosquitoes are most active around dawn and dusk. Take precautions to keep bugs away and enjoy your time outside this summer.

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