

Doc Talk

By Dr. Veronica Naudin



The Buzz about Bee Stings

Q: A bee stung my son and his hand became very swollen. Does this mean he is allergic to see stings?

A: You have raised an interesting and important question. Approximately 1-3% of the population will have insect sting allergies. If an individual is truly allergic, he/she can have symptoms involving the whole body. These reactions can be quite serious.

What should I be worried about?

The most common allergenic insects belong to three different families of insects: a) honeybees b) yellow jackets and wasps c) fire ants. Stinging insects are most active during the summer and early fall.

Teach your child to avoid being stung. Bees often only sting when being bothered. Hence, your child should avoid trying to catch, trap or otherwise annoy bees and wasps. If you are visiting a place where bees congregate, do not clothe your child in bright colored floral prints and do not put perfumed lotion on your child. Also, your child should wear protective footwear.

If your child is stung, try to gently pull out the stinger. Tweezers may be most efficient. However, if they are not available, you can use a credit card to gently scrape the stinger out. Local care with an antibacterial soap and meat tenderizer may help to minimize any reaction your child may have. Many people have been stung by bees and have no local or whole body reaction.

However, if your child does have a reaction, it is likely to be one of two types. A local reaction is usually simple redness, swelling and itching close to the area of the bee sting. A small reaction does not usually predispose a child to a severe allergic reaction with the next bee sting. Small local reactions can occur immediately following the bee sting or can be up to 48 - 72 hours after the bee sting. This type of reaction can be treated with oral or topical antihistamines such as benedryl. If your child has a significant local reaction, a 2-3

day course of Benedryl is usually indicated. And if your child's swelling and/or redness does not improve with an antihistamine, then a trip to your pediatrician is indicated.

A more severe reaction is generalized. Symptoms include diffuse hives with swelling both externally and internally in the mouth, throat, and breathing passages. Another indication of a severe reaction is showing symptoms at a different location from the sting. Severe reactions should be treated as a medical emergency. If your child has experienced a severe reaction, your physician will discuss having emergency medications available for your child in the event he is stung again. Emergency medications include EPI-Pen and EpiPenJr. This is an injectable medication to be used immediately after a bee sting. In addition, if your child has a bee sting allergy, he should wear a medic-alert bracelet.

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Please send questions and/or suggestions to:

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