

MEDICAL GUIDANCE AND FIRST AID PROVISIONS FOR THOSE AT RISK OF INSECT STINGS

(For assistance, please contact EHS at (402) 472-4925, or visit our web site at <http://ehs.unl.edu/>)

EHS has received a request for guidance regarding first aid provisions for those at risk of stings from insects due to the nature of their occupation. Employees at risk are those who work outdoors in the vicinity of areas where bees, wasps, ants or other biting and stinging insects may be present.

Prevention

All at risk employees should be provided training on measures for safe work around stinging insects. Such measures include:

- Wear light colored clothing. (Blue soothes bees. Black irritates them.)
- Wear good work shoes.
- Do not wear perfumes, hairsprays, or other scented products that might attract the insect.
- Be alert to the locations of the insects and avoid them as much as possible.
- Work calmly.
- Do not swat at or flail arms around bees.
- Maintain ready access to communication equipment such as a cellular phone or two way radio for obtaining help in the event of an emergency.

Note: Bees and hornets become more aggressive in the fall when weather begins to cool and food supply is reduced.

Reactions to Stings

All employees should become familiar with the types of reactions that can occur in the event of a sting.

Normal reaction to a sting:

- Pain, localized swelling and itching at the site of the sting.

Allergic reaction to a sting:

The nature of this reaction varies from person to person. Normally, such a reaction can occur within a few minutes of the sting. In some cases, the reaction is delayed.

- Hives and itching on the body at locations away from the bee sting site.
- Swelling of the throat and chest tightness.
- Swelling of the lips and eyelids and swelling at other body locations.
- Difficulty breathing (indicated by wheezing or elevated breathing rate).
- Anxiety.
- Increased heart rate.

Those having a severe reaction should call or alert someone to call 911 immediately.

First Aid

Examine the site of the sting. If a stinger is present, flick it away or scrape it away using an item such as a credit card. Do not try to pull the stinger out or squeeze it in anyway, as this may cause the release of more venom. Treat the wound with a topical product to remove pain and/or apply an instant ice pack. If the victim is becoming hysterical, get them to sit or lie down. Monitor ease or rapidity of breathing. Observe for symptoms of a severe reaction. Call 911 if there is any sign of an allergic reaction. Give victim one antihistamine tablet if there are signs of an allergic reaction.

First Aid Kit Supplies for Insect Stings

Recommended:

- Antiseptic product such as sting relief wipes.
- Instant Cold Packs to apply to sting site.
- Over the counter antihistamine tablets such as Benadryl tablets. (These should be checked periodically for expiration date, and replaced as needed.)

Not Recommended:

- Products for extracting venom. **Note:** These have not proven to be effective for prevention of an allergic reaction.
- Epi-pens. **Note:** Epi-pens are available by prescription only and must be administered by trained personnel. In addition, the medication loses its effectiveness when stored at temperatures above room temperature. They are not recommended as a general use item in a first aid kit.

Exception: Those involved in research or field expeditions to remote sites where medical care is not likely to be readily available may be able to obtain epi-pens or the equivalent for treatment of an anaphylactic reaction. These situations will be addressed on a case by case basis through the Occupational Medicine Provider for UNL.

At-risk employees with known allergies to bees who do not have an epi-pen are advised to see their personal physician regarding their work situation and risk of exposure. The personal physician may wish to prescribe an epi-pen and if so, is required to assure the employee has proper instruction regarding the use and storage of this product. The employee is advised to keep the medicine readily available when in at risk situations. If the employee does not have a personal physician, an appointment can be scheduled through the UNL Occupational Medicine Provider, St. Elizabeth Company Care, at 475-6656. The employee will be responsible for the cost of this visit.