

# Insect Sting Alert

This Medical Update provides information on conditions that may cause serious injuries and in some cases death. Our hope is that this Summer Alert will help you be prepared.

This Medical Alert provides information regarding the **hazards of insect stings** from bees, wasps, and hornets and some information on background, prevention, and treatment of stings.

As many as 35 people in the United States die each year as a result of an allergic reaction to insect stings. This number may be underreported as deaths may be mistakenly diagnosed as heart attacks or sunstrokes or may be attributed to other causes.

Most people will only have a localized reaction to insect stings (redness, pain, swelling, itching, or burning at the site). However, if someone is hypersensitive or allergic to the stings, then it can quickly become an emergency situation. An insect sting may cause a sudden drop in blood pressure, shock, and death. This is called anaphylactic shock. In addition, many people suffer significant reactions from stings that do not result in death.

## Important things to remember about insect stings

- Ask people about allergies and check past history. Add this to the admission assessment checklist or service plan, if applicable.
- If the client has a severe allergy, offer to assist them in obtaining an emergency bracelet.
- Inform the client's health care provider about the level of care at your facility. It is common for community health care providers to assume that persons receiving services for mental health, developmental disabilities, and chemical dependency have more nursing supervision than they actually do.
- Check with the client's physician for the most appropriate method of treatment for each client, and make sure any staff are aware of and trained to specific allergies and treatments.
- If a client has an Epi-Pen (or similar) prescribed, make sure that they understand how and when to use it.
- Signs that may show that a client is hypersensitive or allergic to stings include difficulty breathing, swelling of face and lips, hives, itching, swelling and possible closure of the airway, dizziness, fainting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and a drop in blood pressure.

- Light-colored clothing with a smooth texture can help prevent insect stings. On the other hand, bright colors (especially reds and purples), sweet smelling cosmetics, colognes, or aftershaves may attract an insect looking for pollen.

### **What to do if a client with an allergy is stung**

- **Call 911.**
- The client needs to be transferred to a medical facility as soon as possible. Epinephrine is short acting, which means it loses its effectiveness quickly. Some allergic reactions require multiple doses of epinephrine, as well as treatment with antihistamines and fluids. The allergic reaction may resurface after the epinephrine stops working, so follow-up care is always indicated when an Epi-Pen or equivalent is used.
- After a sting, scrape the stinger away with a fingernail or credit card, and avoid squeezing the area.
- Application of ice helps reduce pain and swelling.