

This alert is for those who work with people receiving services for mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities, and should be posted in facilities or shared with people as appropriate. It provides information regarding the hazards of insect stings from bees, wasps, and hornets and some information on background, prevention, and treatment of stings.

Summer brings many people outdoors, but it also brings out insects that can sting and hurt people. As many as 89 people in the United States die each year because of an allergic reaction to insect stings. 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. An insect sting may cause anaphylactic shock: a sudden drop in blood pressure, difficulty breathing, a rapid heartbeat, or even death. 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 plans, if applicable.
- If a client has a severe allergy, offer to assist them in obtaining an emergency bracelet.
- Check with the client's physician for the most appropriate method of treatment for each client, and make sure 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 (or assigned staff) 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.

### First aid and treatment

If you or someone you are supporting has a severe allergic reaction to an insect sting, immediately call 911. You do not need permission to call 911.

- You or 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 come back 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.