



CENTRAL TEXAS ALLERGY & ASTHMA

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Fire Ants

Fire ants (solenopsis) are a variety of stinging insects with over 280 species worldwide. Unlike many other ants which bite and then spray acid on the wound, fire ants only bite to get a grip, then they sting (from the abdomen) and inject a toxic alkaloid venom. The sting is very painful and produces a sensation similar to what one feels when burned by fire-hence the name fire ant. The after effects can be life threatening to sensitive individuals.

Fire ants are known for their lively and aggressive behavior. They often attack wild animals, baby animals, pets, or people. Fire ants invade homes, schoolyards, athletic fields, golf courses, and parks. Fire ants nest in the soil, often near moist areas, such as riverbanks, pond edges, watered lawns and highway edges.



Types of Reactions

- A) Normal reaction: skin involving the sting site will have redness, itching and pain. A white pustule can form at the site of the sting as well.
- B) Local reaction: The swelling around the sting site is greater than 5cm. The skin reaction can usually last up to a few days.
- C) Systemic reaction: Symptoms occur in areas outside of the sting site (shortness of breath, wheezing, hives ect...) For those individuals that are highly allergic to the venom, the reaction can lead to anaphylaxis, shock, and even death.

What To Do When Stung

- Wash the site with antibacterial soap
- The sting site often forms a white pustule, which can become infected if scratched excessively.
- Apply cool compresses to reduce pain and itching.
- External treatments: a poly topical steroid cream, (hydrocortisone), or one containing aloe vera to the area.
- Oral medication: Take antihistamines (Benadryl, Zyrtec...) to relieve itching.
- Carry epinephrine if you are highly allergic to insect stings
- Self-injecting forms of epinephrine (Epi-pen, ect.) should be on hand and current to prevent an anaphylactic reaction, symptoms of anaphylaxis may include two or more of the following: itching and hives, swelling in the throat or the tongue, difficulty breathing, dizziness, stomach cramps, nausea or diarrhea. A rapid drop in blood pressure may result in shock and loss of consciousness this is a medical emergency and may be fatal.

Remember that epinephrine is a rescue medication only, and you must still have someone take you to an E.R. immediately if you are stung and need to use your EpiPen.

Prevention

- Avoidance, Fire ants are most likely to sting if their homes are disturbed.
- Have mounds around your homes destroyed. (Colonies are founded by small groups of queens or a single queen. Even if only one queen survives, within a month the colony can expand to thousands.)
- Be careful when cooking, eating, or consuming sweet drinks outside because the smell of food attracts insects.
- Keep food covered until eaten.
- Wear protective clothing outdoors (heavy boots and long pants) when near fire ant mounds. Always tuck your pant legs into your boots/shoes.
- Spray insect repellent formulated for fire ants over your clothing when working in the yard.

