

# HEALTH INFORMATION

VIRGINIA POISON CENTER



## GUIDE TO PREVENTION, BITES AND STINGS

### BEES, HORNETS AND WASPS

Bees typically establish new hives in the spring and fall. This is when they are most active. “Bumble bees” can sting you only once. If possible, remove the stinger by scraping it from the skin using stiff card of some type. Do not pinch the stinger to remove it. Call 911 for any breathing difficulty or chest tightness. Wasps also have a painful sting and can sting multiple times. They do not lose their stinger like most bees do after the first sting.

After ensuring the stinger is removed safely, call the Virginia Poison Center immediately. Application of either baking soda/water paste or meat tenderizer/water paste to the sting site will help relieve discomfort and limit the local reaction. Ice may also be applied for 15 minutes at a time every 30 minutes. Contact 911 if you use a prescribed Epi-Pen. All patients with known allergies to bee stings need to be evaluated by a health professional.

### BLACK WIDOW SPIDER

(*Lactrodectus Mactans*)



The black widow is probably the most recognized of the poisonous spiders. They are shy and prefer to live in protected cavities outdoors, but you will sometimes find them in quiet, tight, and undisturbed spaces in your home or garage. The female is about 1.5 inches long with a red hourglass marking on the underside of her shiny black spherical abdomen. The male is about half her size and along with juveniles, may be brown with orange, red, or white markings on the back and sides of the abdomen. Females bite when threatened or protecting an egg sac. The bite is usually not painful, and may go unnoticed. The neurotoxin causes intense pain in 1 to 3 hours and may cause breathing difficulties. Bites may be problematic, especially for infants, young children, or the elderly. Call the Virginia Poison Center immediately if a child or adult has been bitten by a black widow spider.

### PREVENTION

- Remove spider webs and insect nests
- Wear heavy gloves if working around wood piles
- Contact pest control to remove any noted bee hives, cones, mud dives, or ant nests
- Do Not routinely handle unknown insects
- Check shoes that are stored outside or in the garage prior to putting them on
- Use insect repellent when hiking or playing outside
- Do a visual head to toe body check on everyone after outdoor activities





## MORE BITES AND STINGS

### FIRE ANTS

There are two species of fire ants. They respond rapidly and aggressively to any disturbance of the colony or to a food source. A single fire ant can and will sting repeatedly, even after the venom sac is empty. Initially the stings result in a localized intense burning sensation followed within 24-48 hours by the formation of a white pustule at the sting site. A minority of those stung are allergic and may require more intense treatment. Call the Virginia Poison Center if someone has been stung by a fire ant.

### SCORPIONS

There are no naturally habitant scorpions in Virginia. However, scorpions in other states may hitch a ride home with you. The average scorpion sting is a very painful, bee-like sting which may produce a local reaction. Although most scorpions are not considered deadly, the venom is a neurotoxin and anyone stung should be watched closely for adverse or allergic reactions. Call the Virginia Poison Center immediately if you believe someone has been stung by a scorpion.

### CATERPILLARS

Did you know that Virginia is home to several species of poisonous caterpillars? These insects have "hairs" on their bodies that can cause a painful sting if they are touched. Many stings happen when someone brushes up against a caterpillar hidden on a tree branch, or underneath the edge of a lawn chair. Symptoms of a caterpillar sting are similar to a bee sting. There is an immediate, sharp pain and then a reddened, slightly itchy spot. Like bee stings, the sting of a caterpillar can cause a serious allergic reaction in sensitive persons. Apply sticky tape to the site and pull off to remove any embedded hairs. Call the Virginia Poison Center for treatment advice if someone is stung by a caterpillar.

### TARANTULAS

Tarantulas do not possess venom, are not aggressive spiders and only bite when cornered or threatened. There is no scientific evidence that any of their bites are lethal, but bites from some species can be painful and cause unpleasant symptoms. Most bites are like bee-stings. If you are bitten and have trouble breathing, you may be allergic and should see a physician immediately or call 911 for assistance. Call the Virginia Poison Center if someone has been bitten by a tarantula.

### CENTIPEDES

The common house centipede has 15 pairs of legs (one for each segment) and the average length is 1-2 inches long. The last pair of legs in the female are about twice the length of the body giving it an overall appearance of being 3-4 inches in length. Centipedes love dark and moisture rich areas and tend to nest in crawl spaces. Bites are quite painful and may cause local redness or swelling. Symptoms generally resolve quickly and do not leave any wounds. Call the Virginia Poison center if someone has been bit by a centipede.

*Virginia Poison Center*  
VCU Health System  
Business Phone: (804) 828-4780  
[www.poison.vcu.edu](http://www.poison.vcu.edu)

