

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY

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INSECTS



More than 40 annual fatalities result from severe venom allergic reactions from insect bites or stings. Common California biting and stinging insects include ticks, chiggers, centipedes, mosquitoes, black deer and horse flies, spiders, fire ants, midges, scorpions, bees, wasps, and hornets. Symptoms of severe allergic reactions include large areas of itching and hives, difficulty breathing, dizziness, excess sweating, nausea, swelling of the tongue or throat, and possibly a rapid decrease in blood pressure resulting in loss of consciousness. Aside from allergic reactions, biting and stinging insects can cause tissue swelling, infections of bite and sting sites, skin lesions, itching, dermatitis, and pain or burning sensations. The following precautions should be used to prevent insect bites and stings.

Precautions

- Avoid working during peak biting or stinging insect activity times (usually early morning and evening hours), and in favorable biting or stinging insect habitat such as wetlands, along streams, lakes, or oceans, and moist shaded portions of wooded, brush-covered, or grassy areas
- Avoid contact with insect nests, swarming insects, and ant mounds
- Wear a long-sleeved shirt and long pants with boots - tucking your pants into your boots or socks helps prevent access to biting and stinging insects
- Use insect repellants (read the instructions carefully - some go on exposed skin and others on clothing only)
- Look for insects or insect activity before touching objects such as rock outcrops or trees or picking up objects from the ground (rocks, plants, leaves, remote monitoring equipment, etc.)
- Thoroughly inspect the area where you intend to sit, particularly around stumps, logs, boulders, or rock outcrops
- If you experience an insect bite or sting, wash the wound with soap and water, apply an antiseptic, and cover the wound with a band aid or clean dressing - remove stingers from skin by scraping it off and then clean and dress the area
- Never scratch an insect bite or sting
- Get medical attention quickly if you suspect you are experiencing a severe allergy
- Let your field colleagues (and supervisor) know in advance if you are allergic to insect bites or stings so that they can respond appropriately if you are bitten or stung