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Bug Bites and Stings

Beautiful summer days bring lots of good things, but with that comes those pesky bugs! While most bites and stings are simply a nuisance, for some people it leads to an allergic reaction. It can occur even if you have been stung before without an adverse reaction. So, here are a few tips to help prevent and treat bug bites and stings.

First, try to keep the insects away from you. If outdoors, avoid grassy, wooded, and brushy areas if possible, wear long sleeves and pants when possible, avoid wearing heavily scented soaps and perfumes, get rid of containers that hold standing water, and use insect repellent on yourself and clothing.

When using an insect repellent, use one that contains active ingredients that have been registered with the EPA. Use it on your skin and clothing, but not on your face. Do not use insect repellent on babies. Repellent used on older children should contain no more than 10 percent DEET. Follow the labeled instructions and after returning indoors, wash skin with soap and water to remove the repellent.

Oral over-the-counter antihistamines can bring itch relief. You can also take ibuprofen or acetaminophens to provide relief of pain from stings and bites. In addition, there are many topical over-the-counter drugs that when applied to the skin can provide relief from the itching. They are labeled as “external analgesics” or “topical analgesics.”

You should seek medical attention if you experience any of the following symptoms within seconds to minutes: sneezing, wheezing, hives, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, sudden anxiety, dizziness, difficulty breathing, chest tightness, and itching or swelling of the eyes, lips, or other areas of the face. Some people can experience anaphylaxis, a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction. This is a medical emergency warrants calling 9-1-1 immediately.

Lyme disease is also an area of concern. It is transmitted through the bite of an infected tick, and can cause fever, headaches, fatigue and a skin rash that looks like a circular red patch, or “bull’s-eye.” Treated in the early stages with antibiotics, patients usually recover rapidly and completely.

West Nile Virus is transmitted by mosquitoes and can produce flu-like symptoms, including fever, headache, body aches, and skin rash. While most infected individuals have mild disease and recover spontaneously, infection can be serious or even fatal. There is no specific treatment for West Nile Virus.

As long as you know the symptoms to watch for and know how to respond appropriately, you

can enjoy your summer outdoors. For more information on this article, please visit <http://fda.gov/consumer/updates/bugbites061908.html> or call the Texas AgriLife Extension Service office at 903/473-5000, ext. 157.

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