



PATIENT INFORMATION BROCHURE

BEE AND WASP ALLERGY

- Bees and Wasps are insects of the order Hymenoptera, which include Honey Bee (*Apis mellifera*), the Yellow Jacket Wasp (*Vespula germanica*) and the Paper Wasp (*Polistes emarginata*).
- They are usually more active in Spring and Summer than in the colder months.
- Bees and Wasps are social insects that only sting in self-defence, if disturbed, although the African Honey Bee is known to be more aggressive than bees elsewhere.
- The Honeybee is the only insect that leaves a stinger behind in the skin. The female worker honeybee carries the barbed stinger and dies soon after discharging the sting.
- Honeybee venom allergy is more common in South Africa, whereas in Europe wasp sting allergy is more common.

CLINICAL FEATURES OF STING ALLERGY

- Normally some redness, pain and swelling will result at the site of the sting, which usually resolves within hours.
- In the allergic individual, a more long lasting and severe reaction may occur.
- A mild allergic reaction may include redness, swelling, itching and pain, within minutes of being stung.
- More severe reactions include generalised swelling and itching, faintness, sweating, a pounding headache, stomach cramps or vomiting, a feeling of impending doom, a tight chest or choking sensation with swelling of the throat and in extreme cases anaphylactic shock with death.
- Life threatening reactions are more likely to occur in people who are already known to be very allergic to bee venom, older people with pre-existing heart and chest complaints, or those experiencing multiple stings.

AVOIDANCE MEASURES

- Allergic individuals seem more prone to bee stings and appear to “attract” bees.
- People allergic to bee and wasp stings should try to avoid being stung, and stay away from areas that bees and wasps frequent e.g. open dustbins, uncovered cold drink cans etc.
- If a swarm of bees approach, run for shelter as bees are slow fliers and can normally be outrun.
- Keep an insecticide spray in the kitchen and car and have a “bee cloth” handy to trap insects.
- Wasps and bees are drawn to flower fragrances and clothing with bright colours on dark backgrounds.
- Avoid perfumes, fruit juices and eating fruit out-doors.
- Warn young children not to stick their fingers into flowers, as bees may be collecting pollen.
- Wear covered shoes and avoid walking barefoot on flowering fields or clover-covered lawns. Carefully shake out any clothing left on the ground.
- If you are allergic to bees, do not mow lawns, trim hedges or prune trees in mid summer. If one comes across a beehive, don’t disturb it – beekeepers will be glad to come and remove it.
- Wasp nests should have petrol applied to them and destroyed.

MANAGEMENT

- When stung, look immediately for the barbed stinger in the case of a bee sting, and carefully remove it by flicking it or scratching it out of the skin with the fingernail or a pointed object.
- Don’t squeeze it, as more venom will enter the skin from the stinger sack.
- Stings to the head and neck are more dangerous as swellings in these areas may obstruct breathing. Immediately apply ice or cold compresses to the sting site.
- Patients who are allergic to bee stings should carry self-injecting adrenalin and antihistamines. If stung, administer immediately, and seek medical attention.
- All bee-allergic patients should wear a Medic Alert bracelet.

Remember to check expiry dates on adrenaline and replace immediately if expired, or used for a sting.

LONG TERM MANAGEMENT

- A reliable diagnosis of the allergy is essential. A blood test will usually prove allergy. Skin prick tests for venom are not usually done in South Africa.
- Allergy shots or Specific Immuno-Therapy (SIT) treat the actual cause of the allergy. This series of injections must be given by an experienced doctor in a properly equipped surgery. Completed Specific Immuno-Therapy (at least 3 years) against bee venom allergy has been proven to give 96% protection against future bee stings.
- With less severe reactions, antihistamines may be administered. A rapidly acting antihistamine is usually prescribed. Proper medical treatment should be sought immediately.

For additional reading, visit: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bee_sting