Spider Bites

Objective: Identify general tips to prevent and treat spider bites.

How to Use This Module

Spiders can be all around landscaping and horticulture work. Spider bites can be a slight nuisance or a serious danger. For this module:

- Read the information below on spiders, bites, and how to prevent bites.
- Ask your supervisor and other workers to identify areas where they find spiders.
- Review the important points.
- Take the True/False test to check your learning.

Background

Many people are afraid of spiders, but the majority of spiders are harmless to humans. In fact, most spiders are beneficial predators that reduce pest populations such as flies, crickets, and mites in and around yards, gardens, and crops. Spiders normally will not attempt to bite unless accidentally trapped against the skin or grasped. However, some actively guard their egg sacs or young. Most spiders prefer warmer climates and dark, dry places where flies are plentiful.

Only a few spiders like the black widow spider and the brown recluse are dangerous to workers. The black widow is known for the red hourglass marking on its underside. Black widow spider webs are usually built in woodpiles, rubble piles, under stones, in hollow stumps, and in rodent burrows.
Brown recluse spiders are very secretive. They can often be found under rocks, in crevices, or inside boxes or containers. Brown recluses are brown in color. They have three pairs of eyes, one pair in the middle and another pair toward each side of their head. They may have a pattern like a violin on their underside — but not always.

**Symptoms of Spider Bites**

Spider bites can have different symptoms. Most are very mild and need not cause concern:

- Painless bite, not even noticed.
- Slight feeling, like a pinprick, when bitten.
- Slight swelling at the site.

However, other symptoms are more serious:

- Sharp, stinging sensation when bitten.
- Significant swelling at the site.
- Breathing problems.
- Dizziness, with some nausea.
- Swelling of the lips or throat.
- Faintness.
- Confusion.
- Rapid heartbeat.
- Hives.

These serious symptoms call for medical attention — **fast**. They may indicate a black widow or brown recluse bite; or they may indicate that the worker is allergic to spider bites in general. A cloth dampened with cold water or filled with ice may be applied to the bite while awaiting help.

**Preventing Spider Bites**

- Shake out clothing and shoes before getting dressed.
- Check before working near vines, brush, overgrown grass, and wooded habitats.
- Wear gloves when handling firewood, lumber, and rocks.
- Install yellow or sodium vapor light bulbs outdoors since these attract fewer insects for spiders to feed upon.
- Do not stack wood against a building.
- Remove heavy vegetation and leaf litter around building foundations.

**Review These Important Points**

- Black widow spider webs are usually built in woodpiles, rubble piles, under stones, in hollow stumps, and in rodent burrows.
- Install yellow or sodium vapor light bulbs outdoors since these attract fewer insects for spiders to feed upon.
- Check before working near vines, brush, overgrown grass, and wooded habitats.
About These Modules

The author team for the training modules in the landscape and horticultural tailgate training series includes Dee Jepsen, Program Director, Agricultural Safety and Health, Ohio State University Extension; Michael Wonacott, Research Specialist, Vocational Education; Peter Ling, Greenhouse Specialist; and Thomas Bean, Agricultural Safety Specialist. Modules were developed with funding from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, Grant Number 46E3-HT09.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the U.S. Department of Labor.

Answer Key: 1 = T, 2 = T, 3 = T, 4 = T, 5 = F.
Spider Bites

True or False?

1. The black widow is known for the red hourglass marking on its underside. T F

2. Spiders normally will not attempt to bite unless accidentally trapped against the skin or grasped. T F

3. Remove heavy vegetation and leaf litter around the foundation to prevent spider bites. T F

4. Workers may not even notice spider bites when they occur. T F

5. Spiders never actively guard their egg sacs or young. T F