

When bug bites turn serious

Warmer temperatures bring the return of pesky insects, especially at dusk.

Experts say while most bug bites are not serious, there are times when you need to see a health care provider immediately.

Most bites can be treated quickly

[Andrew Zasada, MD](#), an internal medicine physician at OSF HealthCare, says treatment of most minor bug bites (think mosquito or bee) is down to a science.

First, move away from the area so the bugs don't bite you again. If the insect left a stinger behind, gently remove it with tweezers.

"Put some ice on the bite site. Wash it gently. Put a little calamine or hydrocortisone on it. Keep it elevated," Dr. Zasada says.

Don't scratch the bite site. Leave it alone and let it heal. For children who may find it difficult not to itch, put a Band-Aid over the bite. You can take an antihistamine like Benadryl, Allegra or Zyrtec for itching and ibuprofen or acetaminophen for pain.

If you notice a rapid worsening of symptoms in the 30 to 45 minutes following the bite, or if the wound is not healing over several days, it may be a sign of a more serious problem. See a health care provider.

Serious insect bites

Dr. Zasada says in the Midwest, two types of spiders come with dangerous fangs: [black widow and brown recluse](#).

"These bites can cause tissue destruction at the bite site," Dr. Zasada explains. "The venom is very potent. It can cause cell death. It's very irritating."

If the venom gets into your bloodstream, then chest pain, muscle cramps, sweating and nausea could follow. Dr. Zasada says black widow and brown recluse bites are "very rarely" fatal, but the illness they bring is quite unpleasant.

If you think you've been bitten by a black widow or a brown recluse, see a health care provider right away. Your local urgent care is equipped to treat insect bites, but if your symptoms have worsened, the Emergency Department at your local hospital [may be the best destination](#).

Another serious condition to keep an eye on after a bug bite is an allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis.

Symptoms of anaphylaxis include shortness of breath, wheezing and a drop in blood pressure. Dr. Zasada says some people with known allergies may have an EpiPen handy and can inject themselves to alleviate symptoms. Regardless, immediate attention from a medical professional is still needed.

Leave the critters alone

It's inevitable that a stroll through the neighborhood will bring an encounter with an insect like an ant or mosquito. But Dr. Zasada says spiders that pack a punch don't want to mess with humans. They tend to come out at night and live in wooded areas or a dark space in the back of a garage.

In other words, don't mess with them, and they won't mess with you.

"When you take clothing out of storage, shake it to make sure there are no spiders," Dr. Zasada suggests. "When you clean the garage, don't sit on anything that's been stored there for a while. Dust it off first."