

Bee or Yellow Jacket Stings

What is a sting?

Honey bees, bumble bees, hornets, wasps, and yellow jackets can all sting. Most stings are by yellow jackets. These stings cause immediate painful red bumps. While the pain is usually better in 2 hours, the swelling may increase for up to 24 hours.

Multiple stings (more than 10) can cause vomiting, diarrhea, a headache, and fever. If your child has multiple stings, he should usually be seen by a healthcare provider. These symptoms are related to the amount of venom received. This is not an allergic reaction, which would cause trouble breathing, trouble swallowing, hives, or passing out.

How can I take care of my child?

Treatment If you see a little black dot in the bite, the stinger is still present (this only occurs with bee stings). Remove it by scraping it off. If only a small fragment remains, it will come out on its own. Do not squeeze the stinger, because it might release more venom. Rub each sting for 20 minutes with a cotton ball soaked in a meat tenderizer/water solution. (Avoid the area around the eye.) This will neutralize the venom and relieve the pain. If meat tenderizer is not available, apply an aluminum-based deodorant or a baking soda solution for 20 minutes. For persistent pain, massage with an ice cube for 10 minutes. Give acetaminophen immediately for relief of pain and burning. For itching, apply hydrocortisone cream.

Prevention Some bee stings can be prevented by avoiding gardens and orchards and by not going barefoot. Teach children not to disturb beehives or hornet nests. Insect repellents are not effective against these stinging insects.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY (or call 911) if:

Breathing or swallowing is difficult.

Call during office hours if:

The swelling continues to spread after 24 hours.

Swelling of the hand (or foot) spreads past the wrist (or ankle).

You have other questions or concerns.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

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