

Allergic Reactions

Don't Bug Out

According to the CDC, more than 50 million Americans suffer from allergies each year. Allergies are an overreaction of the immune system to allergens – substances that generally do not affect other people. Allergies are the 6th-leading cause of chronic illness in the United States with an annual cost exceeding \$18 billion.

People suffering from allergies can have a range of reactions from mildly irritating to life-threatening. Anaphylaxis is the most severe allergic reaction and can include the following symptoms: flushing; tingling of the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, or lips; light-headedness; and chest-tightness. If not treated, these can progress into seizures, cardiac arrhythmia, shock, respiratory distress, or even death. Food, latex, insect stings, and drug allergies can all result in anaphylaxis.

Bee Careful

While working outdoors, you are at risk of being stung by flying insects such as bees, wasps, and hornets. Nests and hives may be found in trees, under the eaves of roofs, or on equipment such as ladders. While most stings cause only mild discomfort, some may result in severe allergic reactions requiring immediate medical care. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), thousands of people are stung by insects each year, and as many as 90-100 people in the United States die as a result of allergic reactions.



Insect sting allergies affect 5% of the population. Here are some tips to remember if you or a coworker suffers an insect sting:

- Immediately wash the sting site with soap and water
- Remove the stinger by wiping gauze over the area or by scraping a fingernail over the area (never squeeze the stinger or use tweezers)
- Apply ice to reduce swelling
- Do not scratch the sting! Scratching may increase swelling, itching, and the risk of infection
- Seek medical attention if you have a known insect sting allergy or are exhibiting signs of anaphylaxis

Leaves of Three, Leave Them Be

Working outdoors may expose you to the risk of encountering poisonous plants such as poison ivy, oak, or sumac. These plants contain an irritating, oily sap called urushiol. If you come into contact with one of these plants you should do the following:



- Immediately wash the area thoroughly with soap and cool water. The sooner you clean your skin, the more likely you'll be able to remove the oils that cause an allergic reaction
- Wash all clothes and shoes that may have touched one of the plants
- Look for symptoms of skin contact including red rash (which may take a few days after contact to appear); swelling; itching; and bumps, patches, streaking, or weeping blisters
- See a doctor if you develop any of the following: trouble breathing, difficulty swallowing, or eyelids swollen shut

General Precautions When Working Outdoors

- Cover as much of your skin as possible. Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, boots, and gloves
- Avoid swatting! Remain calm and still if a stinging insect is flying around
- Wear a medical identification bracelet or necklace if you have a known allergy

If you experience any symptoms of an allergic reaction while working, please contact our Risk Management team at 847.491.5582.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

- **Preparation is Key:** Keep the topic relevant to your work. With your team, review potential allergens in your workplace along with possible long-term changes to improve conditions
- **Stay Positive:** Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past
- **Share a Story, Ask for a Story:** Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable

Safety at Home – Allergy Relief

Did you know? Americans spend an average of 90% of their time indoors, making indoor allergens an important part of their health. Indoor allergens include pollen, dust, pet dander, and mold. By following the tips below, you can reduce exposure to yourself and your family:

- Use damp cloths while dusting to help pick up allergens so you don't kick them back into the air
- Vacuum carpets and furniture at least once a week using a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to trap small particles
- Regularly change the filter on your air conditioner and furnace, so you aren't pushing dirty air back into your home
- Keep humidity levels around 40% using a dehumidifier in summer and a humidifier in winter. Dry air encourages allergens to become airborne, and too much humidity can stimulate mold growth
- Buy houseplants that act as natural air cleaners, such as lady palm, bamboo palm, dracaena, and Chinese evergreen

For Additional Information

Contact [Gwen Butler](#), Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936 with questions.