

# Bee and Wasp Stings



Wasps are particularly aggressive in the late summer and warmer early autumn months. For most people a wasp sting will wear off within 24 hours and can easily be treated. However, some people can have an allergic reaction which can be severely dangerous. This guide gives you a general overview as to the best way to treat bee and wasp stings to make them more bearable and less of an ordeal.

## Bee and wasp stings

Bees and wasps sting as a defense mechanism, are not generally aggressive and don't look to sting people. However, it is extremely common for people to accidentally step on them in bare feet, or for them to fly into us and then sting.

When bees or wasps sting a person, they inject venom through their stinger into the skin of the victim. When a bee stings they leave behind their sting and a venomous sack in the wound. Wasps have stingers without barbs that they retract when they sting, they can sting people multiple times so you should move away from the area.

## What to do with bee and wasp stings

If someone is stung by a wasp or bee, the area around the sting will become swollen (inflamed), go red and a raised mark will appear. The area can be itchy and quite painful for a few days. If someone is stung by a bee the sting should be removed immediately by scraping it out with something with a hard edge, such as a bank card. Try not to squeeze the sting as this can increase the amount of allergen entering the body and therefore increase any possible allergic reaction. The venom sac can take 2-3 minutes to release the venom and so removing the sac promptly can prevent further venom increasing the reaction.

## Local Reaction

Bee and wasp stings can be painful but most are harmless causing only a local reaction where the area around the sting becomes red and swollen. If the person

who has been stung experiences a local reaction treat as follows;

- Wash the affected area with soap and water
- Apply cold flannel to the area
- Raise the affected body part to prevent further swelling
- Avoid scratching the area

If the sting is more painful treat as follows:

- Apply ice to affected area (not directly to skin)
- Take a painkiller
- Use a cream or spray containing local anesthetic, antihistamine or mild hydrocortisone (1%) on the affected area to prevent itching and swelling. ([www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie))

## **Allergic Reaction**

Some people can have an immediate and more widespread allergic reaction to being stung. An allergic reaction occurs when the venom from the sting triggers a release of chemicals, such as histamine, into the body. Allergic reactions can be localised or systemic. It has been estimated that potentially life-threatening allergic reactions occur in 3% of adults. ([www.acaai.org](http://www.acaai.org)) When this happens, the casualty would require urgent medical intervention.

### ***Localised allergic reaction***

If someone is experiencing a localised allergic reaction the area around the sting will swell up to as much as 12 inches in diameter, if the sting is in the arm or leg that entire limb may swell up. This swelling would start to reduce after a few days. Although painful the swelling would not be dangerous unless the airways are affected. Other symptoms may include a rash, nausea and painful or swollen joints. ([www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie))

### ***Systemic allergic reaction***

If someone is experiencing a systemic allergic reaction this can cause an

anaphylactic shock which is a severe and sometimes life-threatening allergic reaction, causing the swelling of body tissues and a drop in blood pressure.

Symptoms include; wheezing or difficulty breathing, headaches, nausea, fast heart rate, dizziness, swelling or itching anywhere else on the body, a swollen face or mouth, confusion, anxiety or agitation.

If the casualty shows any signs of a systemic reaction or of anaphylactic shock, call an ambulance immediately. In this instance the casualty may need an adrenaline injection, antihistamines, oxygen or an intravenous drip. Assist them to use their Adrenaline Auto-injector if they have one. Remain calm, reassure them and position them appropriately. If they are struggling to breathe, they should sit in an upright position. Putting something under their knees to help increase their circulation can be helpful – into the lazy W position.



If they are not having trouble breathing, but are feeling weak, dizzy, sick, thirsty, and showing signs of shock; you should lie them down with their legs raised to help increase the circulation to their vital organs. They should stay lying down even if they appear to recover, as sitting or standing them up could cause a further drop in their blood pressure. Encourage them to turn their head to one side if they are likely to vomit. Cover them with a single blanket or coat to help them to stay warm and keep in this position until the paramedics arrive.

If someone is having their first allergic reaction, they may not have an auto-injector. In this case get them to the nearest doctor or hospital as quickly as possible as you may not have time to wait for paramedics to arrive.

Donegal Safety Services Ltd provides this information for guidance and it is not in any way a substitute for medical advice. Donegal Safety Services Ltd is not responsible or liable for any diagnosis made, or actions taken based on this

information.

Donegal Safety Services offer a range of First Aid courses which will equip you with the knowledge and skills to treat accidents and emergencies and give life support to casualties until professional help arrives. You can view details of our ***PHECC First Aid Response course by clicking here.***