

HEALTH

Bugs Emerge in Spring to Bug Us

Some pose threat; most bites are itchy nuisance



A live Brown Recluse Spider crawls in a dish at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.

(AP)-- It's that time of year when the bugs emerge to bug us.

Some can pose real threats — Lyme disease from tiny ticks, West Nile virus from mosquitoes, or life-threatening allergic reactions to bee stings. But most bug bites in this country are an itchy nuisance.

How itchy or big the welt depends in part on your own skin, how much of the chemical histamine it harbors. Yes, some people really are mosquito magnets. And no, most of the bites people blame on spiders aren't from them at all.

"People call up really bummed out," says spider expert Jonathan Coddington of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, who points to just two worrisome types in the U.S., the black widow and brown recluse family. Spider phobia, he says, is "out of all proportion to actual risk."

If it seems every mosquito's after you, well, there are about 3,500 species around the world and Coddington says most don't bite humans, preferring other animals instead. But those who do can be attracted by sweat, alcohol, perfumes and dark clothing.

Bedbugs are the latest headline-maker. Scientists can't explain why they've suddenly rebounded in many U.S. cities after all but vanishing in the 1940s and '50s. But once they're in a building, they're famously hard to eradicate. You won't feel their needle-like bite, but you might see a line of red dots in the morning.

Not so with horse flies and black flies. They cause painful welts, and they'll chase any blood meal. And yellow jackets may be a bane of summer picnics, but they're most aggressive in the fall, the reproductive mating season, Coddington notes.

Most people face no risk other than infection from scratching, but there are some important exceptions:

Blacklegged tick species, commonly called deer ticks, that are as small as poppy seeds can transmit Lyme disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention counted more than 35,000 confirmed or probable cases of Lyme in 2009, the latest data available.

Antibiotics easily cure most people of Lyme. But other than Lyme's hallmark round, red rash, early symptoms are vague and flu-like. People who aren't treated can develop arthritis, meningitis and some other serious illnesses.

Different tick species around the country can transmit additional diseases, such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tickborne relapsing fever, and STARI or Southern tick-associated rash illness.

West Nile virus is the main mosquito concern in the U.S. Although cases have dropped in the last decade, the CDC recorded 45 deaths

from West Nile last year. Severe symptoms fortunately are rare but include high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, coma, muscle weakness and paralysis, and the neurological effects sometimes are permanent.

To avoid mosquitoes, the CDC advises wearing insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus. Empty standing water where mosquitoes breed.

At least 40 people a year die from allergic reactions to stings from bees or other insects, according to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology. Potentially life-threatening reactions occur in fewer than 1 percent of children and 3 percent of adults.

But seek care quickly for signs of an emergency, Blackwelder stresses: Swelling on the face or neck, shortness of breath or feeling dizzy.

Bites from a black widow or brown recluse can require medical care, although fatalities are incredibly rare. You may not feel the black widow's bite, but within about an hour pain spreads through the abdomen, with cramping or rigid abdominal muscles. Poison centers stock antivenom, but most people do fine with muscle relaxants and other care.

HEALTH WATCH

Weight Loss Help-- Take Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) meetings are held every Wednesday from 8:45 to 10 a.m. at the Hollywood Senior Center, 1820 N.E. 40th Ave. Anyone interested is invited to visit and learn more. For details, call 503-287-0731.

Cardiac-Rehab Exercises-- A medically supervised exercise program for people dealing with heart conditions. For information, call 503-251-6260.

Stroke Alert Screening -- Check your carotid arteries with a painless ultrasound to assess your risk. Fee \$40. To schedule a screening, call 503-251-6137.

Free Body Basics -- This physician recommended class is appropriate for all ages and health conditions. Plan to attend this one-session class and learn the simple guidelines for

safe exercises, including stretching. Call 503-256-4000 to register.

Families with Mental Illness -- A free, 12-week course for people whose family members live with mental illness is offered at Emanuel Hospital, Mt. Hood Medical Center and Providence Medical Center. The course has been described as "life-changing" by former participants. Registration is required by calling 503-203-3326.

Managing Chronic Hepatitis C -- Third Wednesday of each month at 5 p.m. The informative session is led by a registered nurse to help you manage side effects of medications and dosage preparations and administration; doctor referral re-

quired. To register, call 503-251-6313.

Better Breathers -- An asthma educational support group meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month from 1:15 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. at Adventist Medical Center. For information, call 503-251-6830.

Empowerment through Relaxation -- Free informal meditation classes that address breathing techniques, some gentle ancient African yoga poses and mental balancing techniques. People have left these classes joyful and with a peaceful view of their lives. Call Dr. Marcelitte Failla at 503-228-6140.

Tenderfoot Care -- Treat your feet with a soak, nail trim, buffing and massage from a licensed nurse at one of six clinics or at your home. Call 503-251-6303 for more information.

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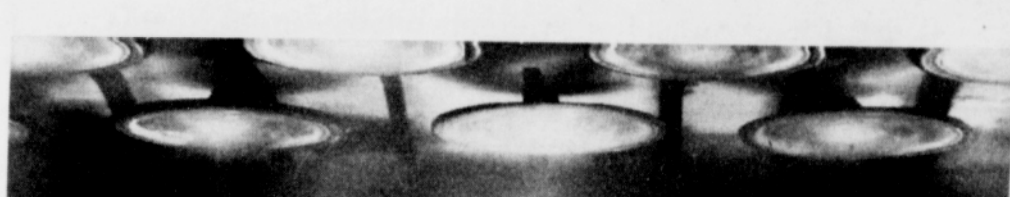
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