



Deadly Bugs

Some of the world's most dangerous insects and spiders can be found in your backyard

You don't have to travel to an exotic location to encounter tiny deadly creatures. There are plenty of creepy crawlers in North America that can do you in. In fact, some of the most dangerous are found in the Lower 48. Several years ago, a 56-year-old Spokane man was bitten by a spider and developed a severe headache, nausea and confusion. A couple of weeks later, the victim, then bleeding from his ears and other orifices, was admitted to the hospital with a diagnosis of aplastic anemia, pancytopenia and thrombocytopenia (all blood-related). Despite transfusion therapy, the patient developed several internal hemorrhages and died. The spider that had bitten the man was a hobo spider, indigenous to the northwestern United States. In addition to the hobo, there are two other spiders in North America that are of great concern, in addition to a variety of stinging insects and scorpions.



BLACK WIDOW

When a black widow bites, it injects a protein venom that attacks the victim's nervous system.

SYMPTOMS: The initial acute pain at the bite location is followed by severe muscle cramps, abdominal pain, weakness, tremors, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, chest pain and difficulty breathing. Blood pressure and pulse rate rise, and chest pains may occur.

TREATMENT: If these symptoms are present, get the victim to a medical facility. In severe cases, the use of narcotic pain relievers and muscle relaxants might be called for. There is antivenin for black widow toxin, but it is derived from horse serum and some people are sensitive to it, so skin testing is required. Fortunately, life-threatening complications are rare in healthy adults.



BROWN RECLUSE

The toxin of the brown recluse attacks the cells and tissues around the bite location. Envenomation can result in destruction of the red blood cells, a lowering of the platelet count, blood clots, kidney failure, coma and death.

SYMPTOMS: Severe pain at the bite location, then itching, nausea, vomiting, fever and muscle pain. Some bites result in a wound that remains open and oozing for weeks.

TREATMENT: There is no antivenin in the U.S. for a brown recluse bite. Initial treatment includes application of ice packs to reduce pain and swelling, and elevation of the affected limb above the heart. Wash the area with cool water and mild soap, and avoid strenuous activity that would raise the pulse rate and spread the toxin through the body.



HOBO SPIDER

The symptoms and outcomes of brown recluse and hobo spider bites are similar, but the hobo is a Northwestern critter, while the brown recluse is found in the Midwest and South.

SYMPTOMS: During the first 24 hours after being bitten by a hobo spider, the bite often looks like a mosquito bite, but then a blister rises, breaks open and leaves an oozing ulceration that forms a scab. If the bite occurs in fatty tissue, the wound may not heal for up to three years. Reactions include headache, nausea, vomiting, soreness and flu-like symptoms. Bite victims generally recover, and death is rare, but skin grafts and amputation might be required, and bone marrow failure may occur.

TREATMENT: Field treatment is similar to that for a brown recluse.

FROM LEFT: BRIGHT GUY; INSEK STOCK; JAVIER S. BLOOM

TOP LEFT: BRIGHT GUY; TOP RIGHT: iSTOCK; BOTTOM: JUSTIN APPELLETT

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STINGING INSECTS

This group includes honeybees, bumblebees, wasps, yellow jackets, hornets and ants. In the U.S., more than 40 deaths are reported annually as a result of insect stings, usually caused by anaphylactic shock brought on by an allergy.

SYMPTOMS: An allergic reaction includes hives, swelling, wheezing, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, anxiety, chest pain, low blood pressure, weakness and fainting.

TREATMENT: Transport the victim to a hospital if he is known to be allergic; if there is a localized reaction larger than 5 inches out around the sting; if there is increasing pain, swelling or drainage of pus; or if the symptoms last longer than a day.

Field treatment includes the removal of the stinger by scraping it out; if you try to grasp it, you risk pinching the venom sack and injecting more poison. Apply ice to the sting site. Wash the site and treat it with an antibiotic ointment. If the victim is allergic, use his sting kit.



SCORPIONS

Of the more than 40 types of scorpions in the Southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico, only the bark scorpion is potentially lethal. Fewer than 1 percent of stung adults die, but 25 percent of children under five years old will die if not treated. Death usually results from respiratory or cardiovascular failure.

SYMPTOMS: Sharp burning pain at the site, local tissue swelling and extreme sensitivity to touch and temperature. The skin might experience a sensation of burning or prickling. Some victims experience cerebral thrombosis, resulting in a stroke. Other symptoms include restlessness and anxiety, convulsions, elevated blood pressure, rapid or slowed pulse, fever, spasms, excessive salivation and drooling.

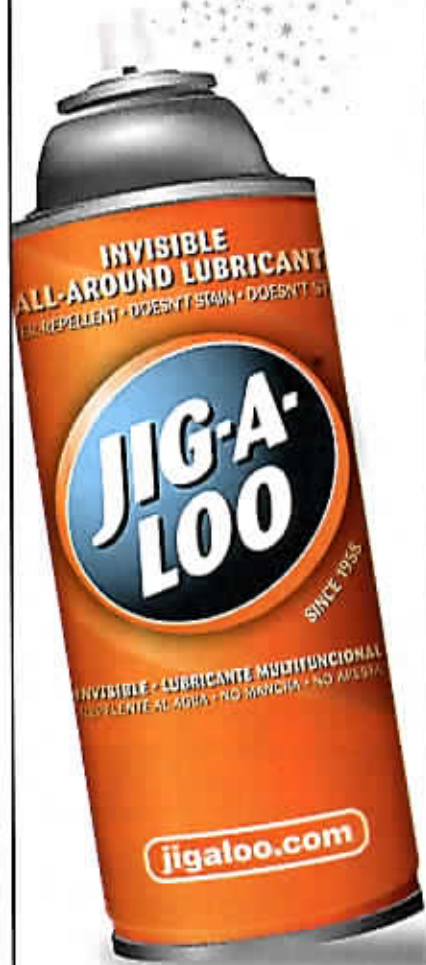
TREATMENT: Wash the site and remove jewelry, as there may be swelling. Apply cool compresses and administer Tylenol (1 to 2 tablets every 4 hours). Get the victim to a medical facility. ▲▲▲

AVOIDING BUG BITES

To avoid problems with dangerous bugs, keep away from their habitats. Spiders hide in dark places, so take care before reaching under logs, leaf clutter or piles of debris. I once found an active black widow nest in one of my boots that I store in the garage. Check inside gloves, hats, sleeves and pant legs before putting clothes on. Always check carefully before crawling into a sleeping bag. Be aware of the nests (both in the ground and in bushes or trees) of stinging insects. Wear protective clothing and tuck your cuffs into your boots when you're in bad-bug country. Liberal use of bug repellent and repellent-treated clothing (visit insectshield.com) will help keep you safe. —R.J.



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