

Common Idaho Bees & Wasps and First Aid for Stings

Honey Bees

Honey bees, one of the most popular bees, represent only a small percent of bee species. They are known for producing and storing honey, or liquefied sugar, as well as building impressively large nests using wax secreted by workers in a particular colony. Honey bees measure about 15 millimeters long and are light brown in color. They are most visible in summer and late spring, when new queens leave their old colonies along with thousands of workers in order to build new nests. At this time, large groups of bees can be seen swarming together to find a new nesting place. It takes a swarm approximately 24 hours to locate a new nesting site.



While most swarms are harmless, certain species of bees are extremely aggressive and may attack unprovoked. Although honey bees serve a significant role in pollination and ecology, some species are known to swarm and attack humans and animals.

Wasps

Wasp species are categorized as social or solitary. As their name implies, social wasps live in colonies, which may number in the thousands. Solitary wasps live alone and rarely build nests. Some wasps are aggressive species, which sting when threatened, and, unlike bees, **wasps are capable of stinging multiple times.**

Paper Wasps

Paper wasps measure approximately 1 inch in length. Their narrow bodies are most commonly dark brown in color, with black wings and yellow markings. These insects are called paper wasps due to the construction of their nests. Paper wasp nests are made from small wood or plant fibers combined with saliva and appear to be made from paper. These nests are frequently found in sheltered areas, such as tree branches and the eaves of houses.



Stings from paper wasps are extremely painful and may produce allergic reactions.

Mud Dauber

Mud dauber (sometimes called “dirt dauber,” “dirt digger,” “dirt dobber,” “dirt diver”, or “mud wasp”) is a name commonly applied to a number of wasps that build their nests from mud. Mud daubers are long, slender wasps. The name of this wasp group comes from the nests that are made by the females, which consist of mud molded into place by the wasp’s mandibles. They are also the main predator of the black and brown widow spiders.



Mud daubers are rarely aggressive and stings are very uncommon.

Yellow Jackets

Yellow jackets are wasps that can be identified by their alternating black and yellow body segments, small size, and distinctive side-to-side flying pattern. They measure between ½ inch and 1 inch in length. They are often mistaken for bees, although their bodies lack the hair and rounded abdomen of the bee. These social wasps live in colonies that may contain a thousand insects at a time. Many yellow jackets are ground-nesters. Their colonies can be found under porches or steps, in sidewalk cracks, around railroad ties, or at the base of trees. Sometimes the queen finds an abandoned rodent burrow to use as a nesting place. Some yellow jackets build aerial nests in bushes or low-hanging branches or in the corners of buildings and other man-made structures. Yellow jackets are attracted to garbage and other human foods.



Known to be aggressive defenders of their colonies, yellow jackets are otherwise not quick to sting. The sting of a yellow jacket is painful and each insect is capable of delivering multiple stings. Because they are equipped with lance-like stingers without barbs, yellow jackets are capable of stinging repeatedly. Yellow jacket stings may induce severe allergic reactions in some individuals.

Hornets

Bald-faced hornets are more closely related to yellow jackets than they are to hornets. Hornet nests are composed of a paper substance derived from saliva and wood pulp. They are located within or atop trees, in attic rafters, and in other covered areas.



Giant Hornets closely resembles the bald-faced hornet. Their nest maybe located near or inside a home and may prove extremely dangerous to humans.



Hornets are typically aggressive and some individuals may be allergic to their sting.

The First Defense

Awareness and avoidance of possible nesting locations is the first defence when it comes to dealing with bees.

Bee Sting Avoidance

- Wear light-colored clothing.
- Do not leave food, drinks, or garbage out and uncovered.
- Avoid wearing cologne or perfume, especially floral scents.
- When opening equipment, be alert to bees coming in and out of cracks and holes, and listen for the hum of an active bee colony.
- Check your vehicle for bees before you begin driving.
- Check vehicles that have been sitting for a length of time for signs of bee infestation.
- Avoid crushing bees and wasps. Many species release a type of pheromone when crushed or killed that can be detected by other members of their hive a significant distance away. Smashing a few bees instead of shooing them away might not seem like a big deal, but when the entire hive shows up a few minutes later, you might regret your decision.

If You Get Stung

- Warn others of the hazard.
- Pay close attention to the area or areas where you got stung.
- Remove the stinger as soon as possible.
- Remove the stinger in a sideways motion with tweezers or a credit card.
- Notify your supervisor once you are safe and have removed the stinger.
- Use an over-the-counter pain reliever such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.
- Thoroughly wash the sting site with soap and water.
- Use Sting-Kill swabs or wipes to help stop the pain.

- Use ice packs to minimize swelling.

What Not to Do

- Do not let stingers remain in the skin – venom can continue to pump into the body for up to 10 minutes.
- Do not squeeze or pinch stingers when removing them. That will inject more venom into the body.
- Do not cut the skin, try to suck out venom or use a meat tenderizer on the wound. Cutting the skin may lead to infection.

Allergic Reactions

- Everybody reacts to stings in some way. Most swell around the stung area. That's not the same as a systemic allergy.
- About 2 million Americans have allergies to stinging insect venom. Many of these individuals are at risk for life-threatening allergic reactions. Approximately 50 U.S. deaths each year are attributed to insect sting allergies.
- Symptoms of a systemic allergy may include widespread swelling, painful joints, hives, rapid pulse, dizziness, difficulty breathing and loss of consciousness.
- Seek medical attention if a person shows signs of a systemic allergy or if swelling extends beyond two joints, such as if you are stung on the finger and the swelling extends past the wrist and elbow.
- If you are allergic, place a sticker on your hard hat that indicates your allergy. Always carry an adrenaline kit – such as EpiPen – and make sure your crew knows where you keep it and how to use it. If you need to go somewhere, have your partner drive you if they have not been stung. Although severe allergic reactions are not that common, they can lead to shock, cardiac arrest, or unconsciousness in 10 minutes or less. This type of reaction can occur within minutes after a sting and be fatal. Get emergency treatment as soon as possible.

By following these basic principles, you can assure your summer will be a safer one.