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TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS OF ILLINOIS RISK MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

RISK REMINDER

Spider Bite Prevention

Two spiders capable of injecting a toxic venom into a person can be found in this area: The brown recluse and the black widow. Let's take a look at each.



Brown Recluse

The body of this spider is about 1/2 inch long and 3/16 of an inch wide with very long legs and is generally brown to yellowish brown. The main identifying mark found on the recluse is the "fiddle-shaped" marking on its back. The wide part of the fiddle is near the head with the neck of the fiddle pointing toward the rear. The fiddle is darker than the surrounding body and stands out against the lighter background.

The brown recluse is typically thought of as an "indoor" spider, but populations do exist in outdoor situations. In buildings, the spiders are typically found in boxes, stacks of papers, attics, old shoes, little-used clothing, closets, under furniture, etc. Generally speaking, a dry, dark, undisturbed area is the habitat of choice for this spider. There are times, however, when brown recluse spiders are found crawling about in the middle of a well-lit room with ongoing activities.

Reaction to a bite from the brown recluse depends on a number of factors, including skin thickness at the point of the bite, amount of venom injected, and individual sensitivity. The bite itself is apparently not painful and most victims report that they were not aware of when the bite occurred. Symptoms associated with the bite can vary from person to person but typically are as follows:

The first symptoms occur 2 to 6 hours after the bite and include itching, swelling and redness at the puncture site. A small whitish area will encompass the reddened area. A small pimple-like structure will form soon after, followed by a blister. As the process progresses, the wound site becomes bluish or purplish. At some point in the process, a black scab may form; this falls off in about 2 weeks to reveal an ulcerated wound. Healing is slow, and it may take 6 to 8 weeks or longer. The sooner treatment is begun the better.



Black Widow

The black widow is shiny black with a red hourglass mark on the underside of the abdomen. Occasionally, there are red dots or hash marks on the upper side of the abdomen as well. The body, excluding legs, is about 7/16 of an inch long and 5/16 of an inch wide.

This spider is found almost exclusively in outside habitats. It can be found in the crawl spaces of houses, in water meter boxes, under rocks, in stumps or logs, around refuse piles, in brick piles, and in stacks of firewood. If black widows use buildings, they tend to be old abandoned barns, houses, sheds, or the little-used sections of garages or basements.

The bite of this spider, as with the brown recluse, often goes unnoticed. The amount of venom injected, the thickness of the skin and the age of the victim are some factors that determine the severity of symptoms. Shortly after the bite, the skin around the puncture site might become red with a central white or blanched area. The venom acts on the nervous system and, as time progresses, pain increases and a contraction or cramping might be noted in the thighs, lower back, abdomen, or chest area. Other symptoms may include nausea, profuse perspiration, tremors, and labored breathing and speech.

Controls

The best way to prevent spider bites is to be aware of where spiders may be and take appropriate precautions. For example, check inside your boots, coveralls, gloves, etc. before putting them on, especially if they have been stored in a locker or other dark area or if they haven't been worn for a while. Also, wear gloves when cleaning out the garage or basement, when picking up firewood, when reaching into old boxes, etc. If you notice any of the symptoms noted above, seek medical attention. In spite of their small size, these creatures can inflict a significant injury.

For more information, contact your Loss Control Consultant at (888) 562-7861

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