

Life saving treatment for fire ant allergy under used

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Two million Americans are allergic to insect stings, an allergy which sends more than 500,000 people to the emergency room annually. Yet, according to a study published today in the March issue of *Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology*, the scientific journal of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAA), while fire ant allergy sufferers know allergy shots can save their life, more than 60 percent do not adhere to treatment guidelines.

For optimal protection against [fire ant](#) stings, allergists recommend allergy shots, also known as immunotherapy, be administered monthly. With this course of treatment, it has been proven allergy shots can modify and prevent disease progression. It can also lessen the chance for anaphylaxis, a severe allergic reaction that can be deadly.

"Our research found only 35 percent of fire ant allergic respondents adhered to treatment guidelines after one year," said allergist Shayne Stokes, MD, ACAAI member and lead study author. "Inconvenience and fear were reported as reasons why the recommendations were not followed."

Immunotherapy is currently the only disease-modifying treatment available for fire ant stings, and other allergies, within the United States.

"Immunotherapy is proven to be safe and efficient at treating allergic diseases," said Dr. Stokes. "It can also result in health care savings of 33 to 41 percent. Allergists are specialists in administering these injections

which can cure patients of symptoms and prevent the development of other allergies and severe [allergic reactions](#)."

According to the ACAAI, fire ants are common throughout the southeastern United States. People who have had an allergic reaction to a sting in the past have a 60 percent chance of receiving a similar or more severe reaction if stung again. Sting attack rates have been reported as high as 50 percent, even for individuals only briefly visiting fire ant regions.

Symptoms of a fire ant allergy can include:

- Hives, itching and swelling in areas other than the sting site
- Abdominal cramping, intense nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Tightness in the chest and difficulty in breathing
- Hoarse voice or swelling of the tongue or throat, or difficulty swallowing
- Anaphylaxis, which can include dizziness, a sharp drop in blood pressure or cardiac arrest

Those who experience an allergic reaction should seek help immediately and follow up with an allergist. An allergist might prescribe allergy shots and life-saving epinephrine.

Provided by American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

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