

The rise of deadly insect sting allergies: Is there a cure?

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If you think summer insects are done setting their sights on ruining your outdoor gathering, think again. August's hot and dry climate is the perfect breeding ground for insects, especially yellow jackets. And for the millions of Americans allergic to insect stings, these late summer bugs can be deadly.

According to a report released today in the August issue of *Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology*, the scientific journal of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI), insect sting allergy is increasing, affecting five percent of the population. But what much of the population may not understand is that there is something that can be done about it.

"While it does not always cure insect sting allergy, venom immunotherapy, a form of allergy shots, can almost always prevent severe reactions to stings," said David Golden, MD, article author and ACAAI fellow. "It usually provides long-lasting immunity even after the treatment is stopped."

Even 10 to 20 years after having an allergic reaction from an insect sting, the chance of having another reaction continues to be up to 70 percent in adults and 30 percent in children. Venom immunotherapy doesn't completely eliminate the risk of an allergic reaction to insect stings, noted Dr. Golden, but almost all of the reactions that do occur (five to 10 percent) are mild, with less than two percent chance of a severe reaction while on treatment. Protection takes effect as soon as the full dose is reached, usually within 2 to 3 months of treatment.

"Allergy sufferers who have had an allergic reaction to an insect sting should be under the care of a board-certified allergist," said Dr. Golden. "For those with severe reactions, prescribed emergency epinephrine should always be carried. Sufferers should also talk with their allergist to see if venom immunotherapy is right for them. It's not

always a cure, but it is close."

As with other forms of [allergy](#) shots, the recommended duration of venom immunotherapy is three to five years. Because relapse can occur, it's best for patients to be regularly tested by an allergist. Venom immunotherapy actually prevents severe reactions, and improves quality of life because people no longer have to fear getting stung.

To reduce the chance of getting stung by late summer insects, the ACAAI advises:

- Cover up with pants and long-sleeved shirts when gardening or working outdoors
- Avoid walking barefoot in the grass
- Take caution when eating or drinking anything sweet
- Don't wear sweet smelling perfumes, hairsprays and deodorants when heading outdoors
- Avoid brightly colored clothing with floral patterns

Provided by American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

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