

Mosquitoes, bees, ticks and more: How to treat bites and stings — and avoid bugs this summer



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Here's how to treat bites from bugs and lower the risk you'll become their next meal. (Photo illustration: Ivana Cruz for Yahoo News; photos: Getty Images)

It's an unfortunate side effect of summer fun: Bugs want to join in too. But you don't just notice bugs more in the summer — they're actually more active this time of year.

"Bugs gain their metabolic energy from whatever the temperature is outside," [Michael Raupp](#), professor of entomology at the University of Maryland, tells Yahoo Life. "The warmer it is, the more active they are and the more rapidly they can feed and move." Unfortunately, that can mean they're more likely to feed on and move around you.

If dealing with bug bites from mosquitoes and more isn't your idea of a good time, it's understandable to want to do what you can to lower the risk you'll become their next meal. Because every bug is different, we had entomologists give

their top tips on avoiding the most common insects you're likely to run into this summer, plus we offer advice from a dermatologist on what to do next if you happen to be bitten.

Mosquitoes

There are a few things you can do outside to lower your risk of being bitten by a mosquito. Insect repellents that use DEET, picaridin, IR3535 or oil of lemon eucalyptus can be helpful, [Jody Gangloff-Kaufmann](#), associate director of community and urban integrated pest management at Cornell University, tells Yahoo Life. You can also flip on a fan when you're lounging outside. "Placing fans overhead on porches or on the ground on a patio can steer mosquitoes away from people," Gangloff-Kaufmann says.

Getting rid of any standing water around your home where mosquitoes can breed, like in empty pots or baby pools or on top of pool covers, can be helpful in lowering how many mosquitoes are around your home, Jim Fredericks, an entomologist and senior vice president of public affairs at the [National Pest Management Association](#), tells Yahoo Life. To keep mosquitoes out of your home, "use screens on windows and doors," he says.

How to treat the bite

Mosquito bites tend to create red, itchy bumps, [Dr. Gary Goldenberg](#), a dermatologist practicing in New York City, tells Yahoo Life. "These are usually clustered" and tend to happen after you've spent time outside, he says. If you're dealing with a mosquito bite or two, Goldenberg recommends applying a hydrocortisone cream, which is a corticosteroid that can ease itchiness. You can also take an antihistamine (your body [releases histamine](#) in response to the allergic reaction to the mosquito's saliva; this is what makes the bite itch, according to Cleveland Clinic). And you can apply an ice pack, covered in a light towel, to the bite for at least 10 minutes to reduce inflammation.

Bees

"Bee swarms are most active towards the end of spring and beginning of summer," entomologist Danielle Restuccia, division technical services manager at [Orkin](#), tells Yahoo Life. However, she points out that bee swarms are "rarely dangerous" and bees usually "have no desire to sting." Instead, "they are looking for a new place to build a colony and are just resting before moving on."

However, if there's a health concern, such as if they are in your house and you or someone in your family is allergic, Restuccia says it's best to reach out to beekeepers in the area to remove and rehome the swarm (here's how to [locate a beekeeper in your state](#)). "They will often remove the swarm for free," she says.

When you're out and about, Fredericks recommends avoiding sweet-smelling perfumes. And if a bee is near you or lands on you, he suggests that you "remain calm, cool and collected." Raupp stresses that "they aren't interested in stinging you."

How to treat the sting

If you're unlucky enough to get stung by a bee, you'll likely know it. Still, there are ways to tell a bee sting from other insect attacks. These will usually cause "a single red, inflamed bump that sometimes has a puncture in the center," Goldenberg says. "Sometimes you can find the stinger," he adds.

In the case of a bee sting, he recommends making sure the stinger is removed — [use the back of a knife to scrape it off](#) rather than tweezers, which can pinch the stinger and release more venom — and washing the area well with mild soap and water. Then, put a cold pack on the sting for 15 minutes or so, and use a hydrocortisone cream or calamine lotion to help with the itching.

Wasps and yellow jackets

Wasps and yellow jackets are different bugs, but both can sting you multiple times. "For wasps, sanitation is important," Gangloff-Kaufmann says. "Don't provide them an opportunity to feed on food and drinks" — such as by covering serving dishes when dining outside — "or trash with food residue."

Yellow jackets tend to stay under the radar until the colony gets large in late August, she says. “If a yellow jacket colony is discovered, either stay away from it or call a pest management company if it’s in a location around human activity,” Gangloff-Kaufmann says.

If there are yellow jackets around you, Raupp recommends that you “get away as fast as you can.” He also suggests sitting far away from trash cans when you picnic outside. “They will attract yellow jackets, bees and wasps,” he says.

How to treat the sting

These bumps look “the same as bees’,” Goldenberg says. However, given that wasps and yellow jackets can sting you more than once, you may have several bites. Treatment is the same as how you would handle a bee sting — wash the area with mild soap and water, use a cold compress and slather on hydrocortisone cream as needed.

Ticks

If you have a yard, Restuccia recommends maintaining it to keep ticks from hanging out in tall grass and brush. When you go out for a hike, she recommends [regularly inspecting yourself for ticks](#), using repellent and wearing the proper clothing to create a physical barrier against them. You can also wear permethrin-treated clothing before going into areas where ticks may be, Restuccia says.

It also helps to use insect repellent registered with the Environmental Protection Agency that contains DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, para-menthane-3,8-diol (PMD) or 2-undecanone.

How to treat the bite

If you have a tick bite, the tick itself may still be attached, Goldenberg points out. If that’s the case, use clean, fine-tipped tweezers to grab the tick as close to the skin’s surface as possible, and pull upward with steady, even pressure, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Clean the bite area and your hands with rubbing alcohol or soap and water, and get rid of the tick by putting it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed bag or container, wrapping it tightly in tape or flushing it down the toilet, per the CDC.

If you suspect that you have a tick bite but the bug is no longer attached, Goldenberg recommends looking for a red bump that crusts and scabs. If you develop a ring of redness around the bite, have a rash or develop a fever, it’s time to contact a health care professional. “Tick bites may require oral antibiotics if a tickborne illness is suspected,” Goldenberg says.

Spiders

To keep spiders outside, Gangloff-Kaufmann recommends sealing entry points around windows and doors.

“Homeowners should also remove spider webs in and around their homes to prevent spiders from staying and building new ones,” she says, adding that you can also dissuade spiders by limiting the amount of light on the outside of your home at night. “Lights attract night flying insects, and spiders are drawn to the easy food source,” Gangloff-Kaufmann says. Fredericks also recommends inspecting things like boxes of decorations and grocery bags for spiders before bringing the items inside.

If you happen to spot a spider inside your home, Raupp recommends that you “shoo it into a glass or tumbler” and then let it go outside, away from your home. However, house spiders don’t do well outdoors. Instead, some experts recommend [relocating them](#) to a part of your house where you won’t mind having them, such as a garage or shed. Spiders are [more beneficial](#) than some people realize, since they eat cockroaches, mosquitoes and other pests that can invade your home.

How to treat the bite

Most spiders don’t bite and typically will do so only if they feel threatened, Raupp says. However, spider bites can and do happen. While it’s unlikely you’ll be bitten by a [Joro spider](#) — which has been spotted across several eastern U.S. states, with experts noting the females have 4-inch-long legs — it can happen. Although Joro spiders are venomous

(and, unlike most spiders, [can take flight](#)), they don't pose a risk to humans and any possible bite would be [similar to a bee sting](#).

However, in general, "spider bites appear as red bumps with crusting and scabbing," Goldenberg says. In the case of some venomous spiders, you may develop something called necrosis — which is skin death — that can create a big ulcer, Goldenberg says.

If you were bitten by a dangerous spider, like a widow or recluse, or if you don't know what type of spider bit you, it's best to seek medical care immediately, according to [Mayo Clinic](#). You should also head to the ER if you develop severe pain from the bite, stomach cramps, a growing wound, problems breathing or swallowing, or redness spreading from the sore.

Fleas

While fleas are a year-round problem, they do [thrive in warm weather](#). To lower your risk of interacting with fleas, Fredericks recommends regularly grooming your pets and checking them for fleas. He also suggests keeping your home clean and washing your bed linens often. Restuccia recommends vacuuming on a consistent basis too. "Regularly vacuuming inside the home can remove flea eggs, larvae, pupae and adults from carpets and rugs," she says. "Outdoors, make sure the lawn is well groomed since fleas prefer to hide in tall grass," Fredericks says. You can also use flea preventative medicine on dogs and cats.

How to treat the bite

If you suspect fleas, look for "multiple small bites," Goldenberg says — that usually indicates a flea bite. You can treat the area by washing it well with soap and water, applying an ice pack over the bites and using hydrocortisone cream to try to tamp down on the itch.

Ants

Doing your best to clean up in and around your home lowers the risk that ants will build up, Gangloff-Kaufmann says. "Keep the table clean, garbage emptied," she says. You can also try using ant bait, Raupp says, such as Terro. Sealing entry points around your home can also help, Fredericks says.

How to treat the sting

If you happen to get stung by an ant, they usually leave multiple small red bumps, Goldenberg says. In the case of fire ants, these bumps can turn into pus-filled blisters. If you have an ant bite or sting, Goldenberg recommends using ice to reduce swelling, along with hydrocortisone cream to stop the itching. If you're in pain, acetaminophen may help too.

Cicadas

Experts recommend not worrying about cicadas. "They are harmless — noisy but temporary," Gangloff-Kaufmann says. "In fact, people should [appreciate the phenomenon](#) that is a large cicada emergence." ([You can even eat them](#), with some safety precautions.)

If you don't want to interact with cicadas, Fredericks recommends keeping your windows and doors closed to prevent them from entering your home. Luckily, cicadas don't bite either. "They aren't going to hurt you," Raupp says.

Fruit flies

Fruit flies are annoying but, like cicadas, they won't hurt you — they don't have the mouth parts to suck your blood.

But if you'd rather they not buzz around your kitchen, Fredericks suggests storing fruits and vegetables in your refrigerator or in sealed containers, and throwing out overripe produce in a sealed garbage can. "Keep kitchen counters clean and free of spills," he adds.

It's also a good idea to keep your sink clean, Gangloff-Kaufmann says. "Fruit flies take advantage of moist food residues and sludge, which is why they commonly show up around sinks in the home," she says. Making a trap of vinegar and dish soap, putting plastic wrap over the top and poking holes in it can also help attract and contain fruit flies, Raupp says.

While it's highly likely that you'll interact with bugs at some point this summer, experts say you can lower your risk of bug bites by trying to keep the pests away. "Homeowners can prevent a lot of these and other pests in and around their homes by simply being diligent about their maintenance and cleaning," Gangloff-Kaufmann says.

SOURCE:

<https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/mosquitoes-bees-ticks-and-more-how-to-treat-bites-and-stings--and-avoid-bugs-this-summer-002909177.html>