

Backcountry Health

insect bites and stings



You feel that bug crawling up your arm. The temptation to SWAT is strong, but don't. Brush it off rather than swat it. When you take to the woods this summer plan ahead to keep nature's smallest critters from ruining your day.

- Don't wear sandals or walk barefoot through grassy areas.
- Avoid shiny jewelry, perfumes and hairsprays.
- Wear light-colored clothing that fits snugly at the wrists and ankles.
- Keep skin as sweat-free as possible.
- Use insect repellents containing DEET. (Children should never use more than 10% DEET.)

In spite of the best precautions, you may still experience a bite or sting. What to do then?

- Try to remove a stinger by scraping it out with a fingernail or credit card. Using tweezers will squeeze more of the poison into the wound.
- Apply ice to reduce pain and swelling, then hydrocortisone cream, calamine lotion or a baking soda paste to reduce itching.
- Take an antihistamine to minimize the reaction.

Most insect bites and stings are just an annoyance, but in rare cases life-threatening ana-

phylactic shock may occur. Get medical help immediately if any of the following signs or symptoms develop: chest tightness, difficulty breathing, swelling of the lips or throat, rapid heartbeat, confusion, hives, nausea, vomiting or cramps. Persons with a known allergy to certain insect bites or stings should carry an allergy kit containing epinephrine at all times. 🏠

—Sharon Lee Maloney, R.N.