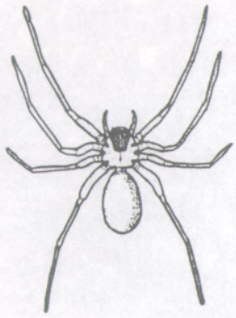
U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine

Just the Facts

16-003-0593

... On Spiders



- Brown Recluse
- Black Widow
- Spider Control
- Care of Spider Bites

Spiders are important predators that keep insect populations under control. While some people are extremely allergic to spider venom or have a great phobia of spiders, only the recluse spiders and the widow spiders are considered dangerous to humans. Even tarantulas, frequently mistaken for dangerous spiders, are not normally lethal to man. It is critical to become familiar with the behaviors of spiders and to understand how to control spider populations in the home.

BROWN RECLUSE SPIDER

The Brown Recluse spider inhabits many southern states. The spider has adapted well to living with humans, and particularly likes cluttered basements, closets, and garages. It is most active at night.

The spider's body is only 1/4 to 1/2 inch long, and its coloring varies from orange-yellow to dark brown to almost black. The most distinct characteristics of the Brown Recluse spider are its eyes, with six eyes in three pairs arranged in a semi-circle on the forepart of the head; and a violin-shaped mark on the spider's back, with the neck of the "violin" formed by a short groove.

The bite from this spider causes a stinging sensation and then intense pain. Within 24 to 36 hours, the victim may experience restlessness, fever, chills, nausea, weakness, and joint pain. The bite also produces a small blister surrounded by a large swollen area. The venom usually kills the affected tissue, which sloughs away and exposes the underlying tissue. The edges around the wound thicken, while the center fills with scar tissue. Healing takes 6 to 8 weeks or longer. Scars usually result.

BLACK WIDOW SPIDER

The Black Widow spider is located across the entire United States. A timid creature, the Black Widow spider is found around houses, garages, rain spouts, and in many other secluded places. Females sometimes eat the males after mating, giving the widow spider its name.

The Black Widow measures 1-1/2 inches in length. Female spiders are jet black, and their lower abdomen is marked by two orange to reddish triangles resembling an hourglass.

Sometimes the victim doesn't feel the Black Widow's bite. A slight swelling later occurs, with two red spots and a redness surrounding the bite. Pain becomes intense in 1 to 3 hours and many continue for up to 48 hours. Victims experience abdominal pains, a rise in blood pressure, nausea, profuse perspiration, leg cramps, tremors, loss of muscle tone and vomiting. In addition, the toxin may cause problems with breathing and occasional unconsciousness. Death

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from Black Widow spider bites occurs in less than 5 percent of the incidents.

SPIDER CONTROL

Spiders are kept under control in and around the house by frequent cleaning of those areas where spiders like to live, such as closets, cellars, and porches. To prevent a spider infestation, use screens, caulk, or weather stripping to seal entry ways for the spiders. Use sticky traps (available in self-help stores) in harborage areas to determine if spiders are present. Contact the local pest control shop, preventive medicine service, or health clinic for identification assistance, if necessary.

Consider chemical control only when necessary. Products containing diazinon, pyrethrin, chloropyrifos, bendiocarb, or a mixture of these insecticides are effective in controlling spider populations. Before applying insecticides, read and follow the instructions on the product labels. Follow the installation's procedures for obtaining professional assistance when control of these spiders is necessary.

ONCE BITTEN

Apply an ice pack or alcohol directly to the spider bite and the surrounding area to reduce swelling. In case of a severe reaction, consult a medical professional immediately.