STINGING INSECTS

The Yellow jacket wasp is the most likely insect to sting you. These wasps are social insects because they swarm. Honey bees are social also but bumble bees are solitary.

Yellow jackets wasps and bumble bees have ground level homes
Hornets and paper wasps build nest on walls and in hedges
Honey bees have hives in trees or in bee-keeper’s apiaries

All stings hurt. If you are stung by a bee, the stinger is left in the skin. Do not pinch it to remove it. Take a stiff piece of cardboard or a credit card and stroke it across the stinger to pull it loose. If you pinch it, all the poison will be released into you. Wasps and hornets do not leave their stingers and can sting many times.

If you are stung there is pain, itching and slight swelling. Ice, Novocain spray and an antihistamine can help. A mild allergic reaction is expected and will last a few days. Watch for infection.

If you develop:

- hives, itching and swelling in areas other than the sting site
- swollen eyes and eyelids
- tightness in the chest and difficulty in breathing
- Dizziness
- Hoarse voice or swelling of the tongue

Get help. Allergic reaction to stings could lead to unconsciousness or cardiac arrest!

If you have this type of reaction you have a 60% chance of having another or worse reaction next time you are stung. Consult a physician, get an “epi-pen” and keep it handy, especially when working outdoors. If you have to use the epi-pen, your symptoms will disappear quickly. Do not be fooled. The effects are temporary and you need to get to the hospital as quickly as possible.

If you must work around wasp and hornet nests, report them immediately.

- Do not swat at them or cause a fuss
- Always wear shoes and work gloves when working outdoors
- Avoid bright coloured or black clothing. Khakis beiges and blues are non-provocative colours.
- Odours of food and flowers attract insects. Do not use perfumes, hair products or fragrant soaps. Put food scraps in sealed garbage containers and be cautious around open garbage bins.
- Carry a cell phone if you have allergies.
- Know how to spot a severe allergic reaction and call security if you need help fast.

Wasps are scavengers, not predators. Bees are busy too. Your best defense is to be aware of the hazards and take the necessary precautions to protect yourself.

Environmental Health and Safety Office

InfoSafetyBulletin (03-001)

Main Office
191 Frank Kennedy Building
Winnipeg MB R3T 2N2
Tel: (204) 474-6633
Fax: (204) 474-7629

Bannatyne Office
T248 – 249 Basic Science Building
Winnipeg MB R3E 0W3
Tel: (204) 789-3613
Fax: (204) 789-3906

Information taken from “Safety First” Canadian Occupational Safety, March/April 2003