Summer Safety Series: Bites and Stings

Introduction

During the summer months, the risk of being stung or bitten by an insect increases with outdoor activities. While most stings/bites cause itching or discomfort, some may result in allergic reactions that require immediate treatment. It is important to know what to do to reduce the chances of getting bit or stung.

Common Culprits

In South Florida, the most common culprits are mosquitoes, fire ants, and other arthropods. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends using the following methods to avoid bites and stings from these types of insects:

- Use an insect repellent approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on exposed skin: https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants – clothes that cover your skin

- Be aware of peak exposure times and places – mosquitoes are active during dusk and dawn, and are found near stagnant water

- Be careful where you step – look for ant mounds near trees or around animal carcasses

- If you have a history of severe allergic reactions to insect bites or stings, consider carrying an epinephrine auto injector (EpiPen) and consider wearing a medical identification bracelet/necklace stating the allergy (CDC)

Not So Common Culprits

Stinging Caterpillars

The puss caterpillar (larva of the southern flannel moth) is one of the four major stinging caterpillars in Florida. It is a non-invasive venomous caterpillar, and its population is booming along the east coast. It feeds on shade trees such as elm, oak, and sycamore. Its poison is hidden in hollow hair-like spines.

If you encounter a puss caterpillar:

- Do not pick it up! The "fur-like" hairs are filled with poison

- If you are stung, remove the spines from the skin using a piece of adhesive tape

- Apply an ice pack to the area

- Seek additional medical attention if symptoms persist or if an allergic reaction occurs