

Health Concerns On The Golf Course

BEE STINGS: TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY

By Cheryl Miller, R.N.



Now that most of Wisconsin's golf courses are open and golf course personnel are working out-of-doors, a word of caution about a common but potentially serious threat to health is in order — insect stings. I read a brief article last year that demonstrates the value of prompt attention. A farm worker was stung by a honeybee on his left ear. Fifteen to 20 minutes later the young man's face itched and became numb. His head, face and nose swelled and turned white. Fortunately, he was taken to the local hospital and treatment there may have saved his life. Insect stings should not be ignored as something only irritating or harmless. The danger, in some cases, is real and can be tragic.

Most allergic reactions in Wisconsin to insect stings occur in August and September, but are not limited to these times. Most susceptible, obviously, are workers who are constantly outside. Here's some background on allergic reactions and what to do about them.

About one in 200 persons is allergic. Proper treatment following a serious allergic reaction can be critical as a victim becomes older. Dr. John W. Yunginger of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota advises that anyone can be an allergic reactor to insect stings. These reactions are nothing to take lightly — nearly 50 people in the United States die every year from insect stings.

Dr. Yunginger started research on this problem in 1974. He began by using a series of bee venom injections to learn how the body produces protective antibodies. Immunotherapy, as this program is

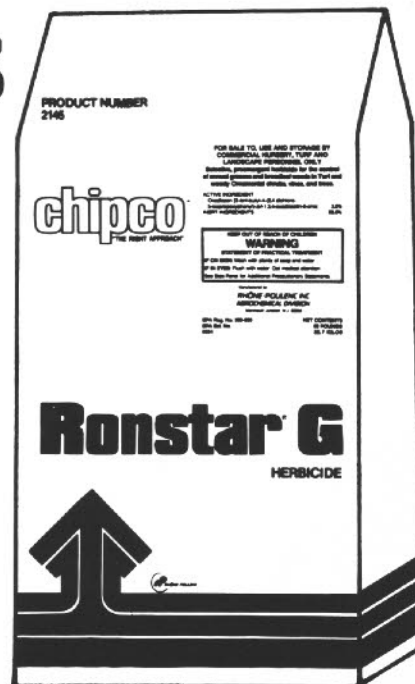
called, is about 95% effective for beekeepers and 98% effective for nonbeekeepers. Patients receive tiny doses (less than a microgram) of insect venom. Following a series of shots a patient eventually tolerates 100 micrograms of venom, which is equivalent to stings by two honeybees or 20 yellow jackets. Shots are usually administered once a week for 20 weeks. The treatment, however, can be completed in less time if the patient visits his or her doctor more frequently.

Allergic reactions are classified as local, large local, systemic, and toxic. If you're stung on your finger and it swells but within 20 to 30

minutes the symptoms have subsided, you've experienced a local or normal reaction. If you're stung on your forehead and your eyes swell shut, that's a large local reaction. The symptoms of systemic and toxic reactions are identical. These include wheezing, tightness of the chest, hives, sneezing, runny nose, and watery eyes. This is abnormal, and one sting to the finger can cause some or all of these reactions.

A systemic response is different from a local or large local reaction in that swelling may occur somewhere other than where you are stung. For example, if you're stung on your foot when you ac-

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cidentally step on a bee and your eyes swell shut, that is a systemic reaction. A toxic reaction is when multiple stings inject an overdose of venom into your blood within about one minute. This could happen, for example, when a golf course worker saws through a nest of yellow jackets in a tree. After several stings you might feel dizzy, develop hives, experience labored breathing, and possibly pass out. Anyone can experience this kind of reaction.

Skin tests determine which venoms you are allergic to. If children under 16 have a systemic reaction involving hives or swelling, shock, and positive skin tests but no breathing problems, they have a 10% chance of having a similar reaction if stung. After treatment their risk decreases to only 2%. An adult who has a systemic reaction involving the same symptoms runs a 60% risk of a similar or more serious reaction if untreated. Immunotherapy reduces that to a 2% chance.

When should you go for an evaluation? Dr. Yunginger encourages anyone to visit a doctor for an evaluation if a systemic reaction occurs. Treatment depends on clinical history and skin test findings. Costs vary from community to community, but generally immunotherapy runs less than \$10 per injection. Venom cost for the first year of treatments run from \$100 to \$500, depending on the number of venoms received. For following years of therapy, the cost is less.

If you have a generalized reaction, swelling in an area other than the sting site, or hives, or if you have trouble breathing and blood pressure drops drastically, injections of epinephrine or adrenaline are given. Epinephrine is life-saving. Allergic reactions often involve a circulatory collapse during which veins enlarge and blood pressure drops. Adrenaline increases blood pressure and dilates the bronchials to help the victim get enough air.

Most doctors prescribe an emergency bee sting kit for allergic reactors. The kit costs around \$10. It comes complete with a disposable hypodermic needle and syringe containing two single doses of epinephrine and

four tables of Chlo-Amine — a chewable antihistamine. The kit also contains a tourniquet and an instruction sheet. However, you cannot rely on the kit alone. Sometimes it can take more doses

of epinephrine to reverse a systemic reaction. As with any medical situation, ALWAYS CONSULT A PHYSICIAN, IMMEDIATELY. Insect stings can be dangerous.

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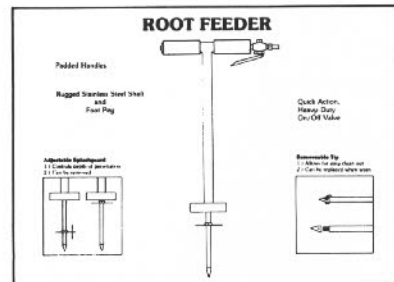
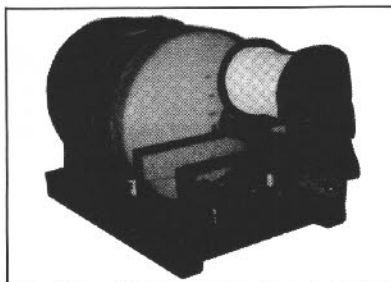
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