

Biting Insects of the Seashore



Fire Ants These exotics were introduced from South America, and are associated with areas of disturbed habitats. They most commonly occur along roadways, lawns, pastures and other open sunny areas. Fire ants build mounds of excavated soils and organic materials. The mound can be 10-24 inches in diameter and up to 18 inches high.

Fire Ants are so called because their venom, once injected, creates a burning sensation. They are extremely aggressive and will swarm anyone or any thing that disturbs their nests. Although there have been reports of people killed by multiple stings, generally the stings are more irritating than anything else.



Ticks Ticks are external parasites on mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Both males and females feed on blood. Ticks can be incredibly long-lived and are able to survive long periods of time without food (18 years in one laboratory experiment). They are also prolific with a female usually laying 6,000-8,000 eggs.

The best means to prevent the transmission of tick-borne diseases is prompt removal of ticks. To remove a tick, grasp it crosswise with narrow tweezers (do not rupture the tick) as close to the point of attachment as possible. Retract or pull tick firmly in the direction of attachment, some back-and-forth wiggling may be necessary. Do not twist or rotate the tick. Disinfect the site and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.



Mosquitoes Only the female mosquito sucks blood, which she needs to lay eggs. These mosquitoes are called “floodwater mosquitoes” because they lay their eggs singly on damp soil or vegetation in areas that are periodically wet. The eggs can remain dormant until they are flooded and conditions are favorable for hatching. Once the eggs are flooded, the adult mosquito will hatch in 7-10 days. Male mosquitoes eat only plant nectar. They mate and die within 10-20 days. Female mosquitoes live about 3 weeks. Mosquitoes can be found year round in the seashore.

Most mosquitoes feed just after dark and again before daylight. Itching bites and welts that can become secondarily infected, are the primary results of a mosquito visit.



Biting Flies (Green Head, Deer, Black and Sand Flies) These flies are common along the seashore from June through August. The females of this species are the ones most encountered, since they are bloodsucking. The blood is used for reproduction. These flies are equipped with short mouth parts for piercing and sucking their bites are extremely painful.

These flies are active only by day. They are particularly numerous in low wet habitats. These wet habitats offer an ideal nursery for fly larvae since they are semi-aquatic in nature. The larvae may require up to one year to complete development.

Repellents and Clothing Stinging insects – bees, hornets, some ants, wasps and yellowjackets – may sting you, but they do not transmit diseases. Biting creatures – mosquitoes, ticks, fleas – may transmit diseases. For instance, ticks can transmit Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease, and certain mosquitoes transmit encephalitis.

You can protect yourself from mosquitoes, ticks and some biting flies by using EPA-registered insect repellents such as sprays containing 28-30% DEET or citronella. Spray repellent on a hat or a bandanna tied around your neck and on your pant legs around the ankles. Wear long sleeves, pants, and socks. Wear light colors such as pastels, white or Khaki. Insects are attracted to brightly colored, patterned or dark clothing such as “blue-jean” blue.

The only first aid recommended is to keep the bite area clean and try not to scratch, which may lead to a secondary infection. Be aware that some people do develop an allergic reaction to stinging insects such as bees and fire ants. If stung, these people need to receive medical attention immediately.

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