

Safe from Spiders

Whatever your environment — house, office, shop, or field — chances are you are working and living near spiders. Spiders want to avoid contact with humans as much as humans want to avoid contact with them! Know the potential habitats of spiders so you can clear them out or avoid them altogether. Spiders may be found in:

- Cracks in the soil, rodent holes, and under rocks.
- Piles of wood, rock, and rubble.

Sheds, garages, and outlying buildings.

- Closets, attics, and crawlspaces.

To prevent contact with spiders:

- Remove and reduce trash and woodpiles around homes and worksites.
- Wear gloves when you work with and move piled materials.
- Never reach your hand into a space where you can't see it; investigate first!
- Wear a long sleeve shirt, pants, gloves, and boots when working with debris and in field conditions.

Eliminate hiding places for spiders by storing and maintaining clothing and equipment properly:

- Shake boots, shoes, slippers, and other footwear out before you place your feet in them.
- Store clothing such as gloves and coveralls in sealed plastic containers or bags.
- Inspect your gear before you put it on to ensure that no spiders have taken up residence.
- Place drop cloths over equipment and tools that may be stored outdoors.
- Periodically sweep, vacuum, and brush areas that may accumulate spider webs.

The spiders that cause most Californians' concern are the black widow, the tarantula, and the recluse family of spiders.

- The black widow female has a shiny, black body with a red or yellow hourglass underneath her abdomen. Males are smaller and marbled grayish-white in color. The bite of a black widow feels like a pinprick and may start to feel intensely painful and stiff. Other symptoms may include muscle spasms, fever,

nausea, abdominal pain, and chills. Black widow bites are more serious for children and the elderly, but they are rarely fatal.

- Tarantulas live in burrows located in grassland, chaparral, and other dry areas. They may grow up to five inches long with prominent fangs. Tarantulas can bite if provoked or frightened, causing a stinging pain. The venom is not toxic to humans but, may irritate the skin and cause an allergic reaction. The tarantula may throw small abdominal hairs like darts. The hairs can also cause allergic reactions and irritations to skin and eyes.
- The recluse family of spiders have tan and brown with violin shape markings on their bodies. In California, the desert recluse spider (found only in the Sonoran and Mojave deserts) has similar bite hazards. Fortunately, the brown recluse spider only lives in the Midwest and the South. Recluse spider bites can feel like a sting, the symptoms may include severe pain and stiffness, fever, weakness, vomiting, or a rash. Because the venom destroys cells, the wound often becomes an open sore.

After a spider bite, wash the area with soap and water. Use “RICE therapy” for the affected area: rest, ice, compression, elevation. Antibiotics and a tetanus shot can protect against bacteria from a bite. Seek medical attention for infection, skin lesions, pain, and other symptoms. Be aware that many skin lesions and necrotic (rotting flesh) type wounds are misdiagnosed as spider bites. Work with your medical professional to evaluate the cause of your wounds for proper diagnosis and treatment.