



Poisonous Plants and Insects

Texas is home to many poisonous plants and insects. Some are a mere nuisance, but others can cause severe reactions or even death. Member entity employees should be able to identify these hazards, and supervisors and coworkers should be made aware of those with allergies to ensure appropriate prevention and treatment. In one tragic situation, a Member's parks department employee was mowing, unaware of a massive beehive in a tree above him. He was swarmed by the bees and ultimately passed away from the stings. The information below will help Members identify and avoid contact with harmful plants and insects.



Common Poisonous Plants: Poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac

- Urushiol oil from plants can be transferred to skin, clothing, or equipment, causing allergic reactions
- Plant oils remain active, even during dormant seasons
- Cutting, pulling, and burning plants can also spread oil on skin and to mucus membranes



Common Flying Insects: Bees, wasps, hornets, yellowjackets, and mosquitos

- Often found in roof soffits and eaves, brush piles, vaults, meter boxes, trees, vacant buildings, or other areas of overgrowth
- Most are not poisonous, unless a person is allergic
- Mosquitos can carry and pass West Nile Virus, Zika, or other diseases to hosts



Common Crawling Insects:

- Black widow spiders, brown recluse spiders, and scorpions
 - Often found in dark meter boxes, vaults, moist areas with low lighting, and under logs/brush
 - Most scorpions in Texas are not poisonous, unless a person is allergic
 - Spider bites should be evaluated by a physician, as black widow and brown recluse bites are highly toxic
- Fire ants, fleas, ticks
 - Often found in wooded, rural areas, brush, or in thick trees
 - Most ants and fleas are not poisonous, unless a person is allergic
 - Some Texas ticks carry Lyme Disease – seek treatment if sickness accompanies a tick bite



Pre- and post-exposure control methods:

- Train employees on the identification and avoidance of poisonous plants and insects
- Use pre-exposure barrier creams and wear long sleeves, pants, and gloves in areas plants are known to exist and have post-exposure EpiPen or OTC treatments – such as cleansers/creams – available
- Clean clothing, equipment, and tools following plant exposure (cold water is best)
- Insecticide and herbicide treatment to clear or prevent poisonous plants or insects
- Keep gutters clear, clean up debris or brush piles, eliminate standing water
- Call poison control center or 9-1-1 if additional assistance is needed

Additional Resources:

[U.S. Center for Disease Control: Bees, Wasps, Hornets.](#)

[Texas Department of Insurance: Poison Ivy, Oak, Sumac Fact Sheet](#)

[Texas Department of State Health Services, Zoonotic Health Topics](#)

[Texas Poison Center Network – Poisonous Plants – A Guide to Prevention](#)

[TMLIRP Media Library:](#) Dealing with Bugs and Critters (includes English and Spanish Version) (Disk #274); Killer Bees, Wasps, and Spiders (Disk #600); Celebrate Safely (Disk #684); Groundskeeping Safety (Disk #796).