

Black Widow



The black and brown widows are widely distributed over the warmer portions of the United States. Females are easily identified because of their globular, shiny black or brown abdomen with two reddish or yellowish triangles on the underside. These reddish or yellowish triangles form a characteristic hourglass marking. The abdomen is about 1/4 inch in diameter but may be as large as 1/2 inch when the female is full of eggs. Males are much smaller and lighter colored,

with light streaks on their abdomens.

Widow spider venom contains toxins that are neurotoxic (affects the nervous system). The severity of a person's reaction to the bite depends on the area of the body where the bite occurs; the person's size and general sensitivity; the amount of venom injected; depth of bite; seasonal changes (in venom potency); and temperature. The bite produces a sharp pain similar to a needle puncture. The pain usually disappears rapidly. Local muscular cramps are felt 15 minutes to several hours after the bite, spreading and becoming more severe as time passes. The venom then grows weak, tremors develop, and the abdominal muscles show a board-like rigidity. Respiration becomes spasmodic and the patient is restless and anxious. During this period, a feeble pulse, cold skin, labored breathing and speech, light stupor, and delirium may be noted. Convulsions and death may result with some victims, especially if the person is sensitive to the venom and no treatment is received. An anti-venom specific for the black or brown widow is readily available to most physicians.



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