

BLACK WIDOW SPIDER

In Oklahoma, the Black Widow spider is one of two spiders considered dangerous to people, and is generally considered the most venomous spider native to North America!

Death from black widow bites results in 1% or less of cases.

- Very young or very old individuals are at greatest risk.

The bite of a female injects a neurotoxic venom, which commonly gives rise to very severe symptoms.

- A bite victim should consult a physician immediately.
- The “bite” is usually similar to a pin prick.
- Within a few minutes, excruciating pain may begin, spreading from the bite site to a victim’s arms, legs, chest, back and abdomen.
- Within a few hours, symptoms—such as chills, vomiting, difficulty breathing, profuse sweating, delirium, partial paralysis, violent abdominal cramps, pain and spasms—may result.
- Pain resulting from a female Black Widow bite can be so severe, as to lead to frequent misdiagnosis as appendicitis, colic or food poisoning.
- Typically, recovery is complete in 1 to 5 days.



Results from a bite range from minor to severe. Many factors effect a human’s reaction to a bite—such as the:

- amount of venom injected,
- site on the body where a spider bite is located, and
- length of time a spider’s fangs are in human tissues.

Humans react differently to the same type and amount of spider venom due to:

- age
- general state of health, and
- possibly, due to our genetics.

No North American spider is considered “aggressive” unless cornered, injured or overly provoked. They are usually more aggressive / protective when an egg sac is present in their web. Many North American spiders *will rush over their webs to investigate any disturbance*—a natural hunting reaction, as many species of spiders use webs to entrap their food.

INTERESTING FACTS: Black Widow webs are extraordinarily strong and have been known to snare animals as large as mice! Her web “threads” are also used for crosshairs in rifle sights!

Identifying “Black Widow” markings

Red-orange “hourglass” shaped spot, or two separate spots.



Black Widow Spider hanging “belly upward” with egg sack, in her web—

Recognition:

The female Black Widow spider is important to recognize; her bite can potentially result in serious medical problems.

Her best identification mark is a reddish hourglass-shaped spot on the underside of her globular abdomen. She is glossy black in color and slightly larger than the Brown Recluse spider, commonly called a “fiddleback”.

Please use our QR code to secure an Extension Fact Sheet, #EPP-7301, “Spiders: Brown Recluse, Black Widow and Other Common Spiders”.



The black widow is globular in shape, is never hairy and has 8 eyes arranged in two rows. The overall length of the female, with legs extended, is about 1 ½ inches. The female has slim, glossy black legs.

The male Black Widow spider is much smaller, about 1” long. He usually has three light streaks on the abdomen, and is recognizable by *the knob-like appendages* on the front of the head.

Habitat

The Black Widow female normally hangs “belly upward” and rarely leaves her web.

- **Indoors:** Cold and drought seemingly drive black widows into buildings.
- **Outdoors:** Females prefer dark, quiet, undisturbed areas—under house eaves, in crawl spaces; barns, cellars, garages, sheds; in rain spouts, weep holes, outdoor furniture/park benches; around trash cans, dumps or ash piles; under boxes, stones, low-growing shrubs & crates; in wood piles, rodent burrows, underground water meter casings, gas meter housings & electrical boxes.



Male Black Widow

Prevention

Frequently cleaning outdoors and “in and around” out buildings, maintaining minimal clutter securing screens, weather stripping and caulk to seal buildings, and washing under roof eaves with a water hose will all help to prevent spiders’ presence.

First Aid

To relieve local swelling and pain, apply an ice pack or alcohol directly to the spider bite area. If bite is from a Brown Recluse or Black Widow spider, contact a physician immediately. If possible, take the biting spider in a sealed clear container, for positive identification. Locate county OSU Extension Offices for assistance with spider identification, at: