

# Is it a spider bite?

There have been some recent complaints about “spider bites” at shelters and from people who camp or spend a lot of time outside.

## Have all these people actually been bitten by a spider?

- Some people may have real spider bites, but health care providers are finding that most of these painful, red, swollen sores are actually caused by *a staph infection called MRSA*, a form that is resistant to the antibiotic Methycillin. MRSA is becoming more common throughout the community and is seen in all types of people.
- Actual Hobo Spider bites look a lot like staph infections.
- **Over 80% of what are thought to be spider bites turn out to be skin infections - usually staph.**

### For more information on MRSA Staph infections:

Centers for Disease Control:  
[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ARESIST/ca\\_mrsa\\_public.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ARESIST/ca_mrsa_public.htm)

Public Health—Seattle & King County:  
[www.kingcounty.gov/health/hch](http://www.kingcounty.gov/health/hch)

### For more information on Hobo spiders and bites:

National Park Service Public Health Program  
[http://www.nps.gov/public\\_health/info/factsheets/fs\\_hobo.htm](http://www.nps.gov/public_health/info/factsheets/fs_hobo.htm)

**Public Health**   
**Seattle & King County**

Health Care for the Homeless Network  
Public Health - Seattle King County  
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# Spider Bites



Learn how to  
identify and treat  
spider bites

Health Care for the Homeless Network  
Phone: 206-296-5091

# Do you think you may have a spider bite?

## Types of Spider Bites

Washington has over 800 types of spiders. Poisonous ones are relatively rare in our region but include...

**Black Widow Spiders:** Only the females are poisonous. They are black with a red hour-glass shape on their back, are about 2 inches long, and build strong irregularly shaped webs outdoors. They like shady, damp places.

### Symptoms of a Black Widow bite:

- ◆ The venom is worse than the bite.
- ◆ Bites may be painless, red, and may have 2 visible fang marks.
- ◆ Within about an hour the person will become agitated, anxious, sick, and may have a headache, chills, muscle cramps near the bite, seizures, and high blood pressure.

### What to do if you get bitten:

- ◆ Hospitals have the antidote to counteract the bite, and medications to treat high blood pressure, seizures, and shock.
- ◆ **The bitten person can go into shock so this bite requires immediate medical attention.**
- ◆ Put an ice pack on the bite.
- ◆ Don't let the person move around.
- ◆ Don't use a tourniquet.
- ◆ Don't suck the bite!  
It won't help, and can make it worse.



**Hobo spiders** come in various shapes, colors, and sizes, and look like many other spiders which are not poisonous. They are **not** the same as Brown Recluse Spiders, which are almost never found in Washington, but are common in the southeast.

The Hobo is gray-brown, may or may not have light markings on its back, and varies in size from less than ½ inch to ¾ inch long. *It is not aggressive, and only bites if provoked.* Hobo spiders like basements, dark places (they are almost blind), damp areas, woodpiles, window wells, shady areas of shrubbery, near foundations, and under piles of yard waste, rocks, and logs. They occasionally get into buildings when in search of mates. In buildings they hide in corners and under furniture.

### Symptoms of a Hobo spider bite:

- ◆ Bite is painful, red, and very soon swollen.
- ◆ Blister forms within 36 hr. Tissue in center of blister may become necrotic and die.
- ◆ Headache, weakness, drowsiness, vision problems or hallucinations.
- ◆ Hobo Spider bite wounds are very slow to heal.

### What to do if you get bitten:

- ◆ It is wise to have any red swollen welts, bumps, large boils, or abscessed areas looked at by a healthcare provider.
- ◆ Hobo spider bites can become progressively worse and you may need antibiotics.
- ◆ Keep the wound covered in order to protect yourself and to prevent any germs from spreading to others.
- ◆ **Remember: If any kind of wound or bite develops red streaks or the redness quickly grows larger in area, go to the hospital immediately.**

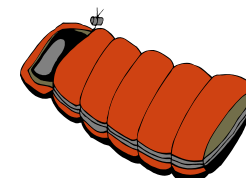
## How to avoid getting bitten:

Always take care when you may be in spider territory.

- ◆ Use rakes or other tools to move logs, rocks, stones, debris, and yard waste. Spiders only bite to protect themselves when frightened.



- ◆ Wear gloves, long sleeves, and long pants when working outside in shady areas. (This protects you from ticks and mosquitoes as well!)
- ◆ Be careful when setting up camps in areas that are attractive to spiders including shady damp places, under bridges, and in wooded areas.



- ◆ When camping outdoors, shake out bedding to avoid bites while sleeping