Spiders

Spiders have been the subject of years of negative publicity. Their secretive nature, way of moving and predatory lifestyle make them common subjects as villains in folklore and popular media. Fear of a few highly poisonous spiders such as black widow and brown recluse spiders has expanded to include all spiders by many people. Black widows and brown recluse spiders are not native to Maine although they occasionally hitchhike into our state on used furniture and other materials. Spiders can be considered to be beneficial when they feed on household and garden insect pests. It is unfortunate that many incidents of unknown skin irritation are attributed to spider bites.

Description and Biology

Spiders have two body regions (a fused head and thorax [the cephalothorax] and an abdomen) as well as 8 legs. They are relatives of insects that have 3 body regions (head, thorax and abdomen) and 6 legs. Spiders can spin silk used to make webs for holding eggs, securing prey, or transportation. Some spiders wait for prey to get caught in their webs while others actually hunt for prey. Chance encounters with spiders or their webbing in unlikely places can render them a nuisance. Some spiders may bite in self-defense when carelessly handled or accidentally trapped.

Types of spiders occasionally encountered in buildings include wolf, fisher, jumping and house spiders. Wolf and fisher spiders tend to be large, hairy and fast. These tend to wander into houses from the outdoors. Fisher spiders are common along lakes, rivers and marshes and can actually feed on small fish and tadpoles. Jumping spiders, which are also hairy, are smaller and more compact, often move in short quick starts. House spiders tend not to be hairy and are usually stationary, associated with their webbing.

Prevention and Control

Spider problems can be avoided or lessened by cleaning and sealing them out. Clearing out clutter eliminates their hiding places. Window and door screens should be intact and tight fitting. Cracks and crevices in the foundation and siding should be sealed or caulked to prevent entrance of spiders.

Spiders and webs can be removed by frequent dusting, sweeping, or vacuuming in corners, under furniture, behind pictures and bulletin boards, and other hiding places. Any undisturbed area may harbor spiders. Since spiders eat insects, eliminating insects in and around buildings will help reduce encounters with spiders.

General sanitation, both indoors and outdoors, is very important in spider control. At home, clean up all woodpiles, rocks, trash, compost piles, old boards, and other debris. To avoid spider bites, wear gloves when working around any materials that have been stockpiled for any length of time. Control of excess moisture is also helpful. Keep crawl spaces, basements and porches as

dry as possible. Trim trees and shrubs far enough away from the foundation to allow sunlight and wind to penetrate. Use a pressure washer to eliminate spiders and insects that accumulate around exterior lights attached to the building. Replacing building-mounted lights with post-mounted lights directed toward the building will help to reduce spiders and insects coming into the building. Replacing mercury lamps with sodium vapor lamps will also help.

Cracks and crevices should be sealed to keep spiders from coming indoors. Screens, tight-fitting doors and windows will help keep spiders out.

Indoors, the best control device is the vacuum. Use a vacuum to remove spiders and webs indoors. Vacuum corners, registers, vents, and windows often to eliminate spiders, insects and webs. Do not allow boxes and other materials to remain in one place too long. Undisturbed clutter and stored items make excellent spider hide-aways. Also, vacuuming up any insects found indoors will help to eliminate the spiders that prey on them.

State regulations prohibit the use of any pesticides (including over-the-counter bug sprays, ant cups, mouse poison and more) in and around public facilities including State properties and all K-12 schools except by properly licensed and certified applicators.

Spider Bites

Although spider bites are not common and they rarely cause adverse reactions, medical advice should of course be sought if you think you have been bitten by a spider and are showing any serious symptoms (see http://www.umm.edu/non_trauma/spider.htm).

What You Can Do

- If you are being bothered by spiders or other pests at your workstation report it to your building manager or ask your building custodian to eliminate any spiders, webs and insects found. Be patient and understanding of the long list of responsibilities assigned to your hardworking custodians.
- You may wish to use a tissue or fly swatter to squish the occasional hapless critter wandering across your desk or window or you can cover it with a jar, slip a piece of paper under it and escort it outdoors.
- Keep your work station and surrounding spaces free from clutter, boxes and other stored items.
- Do not use bug sprays or other pesticides – that is a violation of Maine state regulations and can present an unnecessary health risk to you and your co-workers.

This fact sheet is adapted from Spiders Fact Sheet published by the Pest Management Office, University of Maine Cooperative Extension and from Home Maintenance and Repair – publication # 01500561 12/04/98 published by Michigan State University Extension