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A Stinging Problem

Three hundred and fifty people received medical attention because of wasp stings last summer. Approximately 100 of these cases occurred in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough in the vicinity of Palmer and Wasilla. In the United States insect bites cause twice as many deaths as snake bites. Bees, wasps, yellow jackets and hornets are the most common source of envenomization - injury from the venoms produced by insects. The sting from this group of insects are usually exceedingly painful and individuals sensitized to wasp venom can suffer severe complications.

Wasps can become very annoying when nests are located near homes. Adult wasps are attracted by the odor of sweets, fruit, and meat and will bite pieces from solid foods. They are extremely persistent and are difficult to drive away.

Nests above ground are much easier to see than those underground. Hikers and fishermen can walk over a nest before they realize its presence. Operators of heavy equipment clearing land have been severely stung.

In order to minimize the chance of bites by stinging insects, a person should wear light colored, smooth fabrics and avoid leather and suede. Hair should be covered and scented cosmetics should not be used. When approached by stinging insects, stand still or move slowly. Use insect repellents. DEET (diethyl-toluamide) is the active ingredient in locally available repellents. Liquid repellents are preferred over aerosol containers. A liquid repellent with the largest percentage of DEET will provide greater protection for longer periods.

Treatment of envenomization by the physician varies with the type of insect venom and the nature of severity of the symptoms. The victim should be transported to a physician. If this is not possible, a physician should be called. The patient should be kept warm and quiet. If anaphylactic shock symptoms occur, the situation is critical and a physician must be reached at once.

(Reported by James Allen: Environmental Health Section)

#### **Seward Follow-Up**

A program of screening for diphtheria has revealed 2 additional cases and 6 carriers of the organism. All are receiving therapy.