

Q&A on Redback Spiders for Citizens (2nd Edition)

2021.6.4

Characteristics

Q1. What are the characteristics of widow spiders?

A1. The backs of widow spiders are marked with a red hourglass or quadrilateral shape.

Q2. What are the characteristics of redback spiders?

A2. The venomous female redback spider has a body length of approximately 1 cm long (approximately 3 to 4 cm long including legs). The whole body is black, with red marks on its stomach, and red belt-shaped pattern on its back.

Q3. What are the characteristics of brown widow spiders?

A3. The venomous female brown widow spider has a body length of approximately 1 cm (approximately 3 to 4 cm long including legs). There are grey or black speckles on its back and red pattern on its stomach.

Q4. Where are the spider webs of widow spiders?

A4. The spider webs of widow spiders are irregularly shaped and are found in gaps close to the ground and cracks on buildings. In the winter, webs are mostly found tangled with fallen leaves, withered grass and the corpses of insects.

Habitats

Q1. Where do widow spiders live?

A1.

- a) Outdoor places that are relatively warm and in the sun
- b) Places with many potential preys such as insects and small animals
- c) Somewhere narrow and in cover, with cracks or gaps suitable for spider webs

Street gutters, the inside of bicycle saddles and covers, underneath benches and slides, the flower beds and holed bricks in parks, the inside and depression of flower pots and planters, inside shoes that have been placed outdoor for a long time, these are all places that fulfilled the three requirements above, and where widow spiders like to live in.

Method of Handling Spiders when Found

Q1. What should I do when I have found a widow spider?

A1. When you have found a widow spider, do not panic and handle it calmly, making sure you have fully protected yourself from being bitten. Do not handle with bare hands. These spiders tend to play dead to protect themselves, so even when they are stationary, there is a possibility that they are still alive, so take extra caution.

You can exterminate them using household insecticide sprays. If they are not available, you can crush them with your feet. Do not handle spider corpses with bare hands, make sure you wear gloves or use tools like disposable chopsticks or broom.

When you have found a spider with characteristic red patterns on its back and stomach, as a precautionary measure, please contact the Living Environment Section of the ward office in the area.

Q2. How do I exterminate widow spiders?

A2. Use a household insecticide spray or crush it with your feet.

Q3. How do I exterminate egg sacs of widow spiders?

A3. Place the egg sacs in a plastic bag using something like disposable chopsticks, and then crush the content with your feet or burn the bag and its content with a lighter.

Q4. When I have found a spider, it is better to exterminate it no matter what?

A4. Most spiders are beneficial as they prey on harmful insects. As long as the spider is not harmful and there are no legitimate reasons, please do not exterminate them.

Things to Watch Out for on a Daily Basis

Q1. Regarding widow spiders, what are some things to watch out for on a daily basis?

A1. When gardening or doing other household chores outside, make sure to wear thick gloves (cotton or leather gloves, etc.) and socks. Before putting on shoes that have been left outside, check for spiders that might have gotten in.

Handling Bites

Q1. What should I do if I have been bitten by a widow spider?

A1. Wash the bite under warm or soapy water, and go to a hospital for diagnosis as soon as possible. When receiving treatment, it will be helpful to bring along the spider corpse that has been killed with insecticide. However, it might be difficult to make a diagnosis with a corpse that has been crushed with feet.

Q2. What should I do if I am not sure what has bitten me?

A2. As a precautionary measure, wash the bite with warm or soapy water. This will keep the bite clean and wash out potential poison. If no symptoms of pain emerge, there is a high possibility that the spider is not a widow spider. However, please get it checked at a hospital if any symptoms emerge.

Q3. What are the symptoms when bitten?

A3. It will vary depending on the person, but in general, you will experience needle like pain at the bite right after being bitten, and the area around the bite will feel hot, become red and swollen, with localized sweating. Around 5 minutes after being bitten, you will feel strong localized pain, and from then on the intensity and affected area will increase and spread through the whole body. As time passes, the pain will spread from the bite to the rest of the bitten limb with possible swelling and pain in its lymph nodes. Besides stomach pain, depending on the person, further symptoms include nausea, vomiting, fever, excessive sweating, fatigue, dizziness, headache, skin rash all over body, high blood pressure, diarrhea, lung hemorrhage, difficulty in breathing, difficulty in urinating, serious trismus (lock jaw), lack of appetite, puffy eyelids, joint pains throughout the body, tremor throughout the body, watering of the eyes (tearing), psychosis, bradycardia (infrequent and irregular pulse), and tachycardia (overly frequent and irregular pulse). When these serious symptoms have emerged, immediately call 119 for ambulance.

Q4. Does getting bitten result in death?

A4. No case of death has been reported in Japan. Even in Australia, where many redback spider bite victims are treated with antivenins, there has been no case of death since the introduction of antivenins in 1956.

Consultation regarding Widow Spiders

Please contact the following mail address for consultation on redback spiders.

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