

## Information Sheet: *Black Widow Spiders*



The black widow spider (*Latrodectus mactans*) is the only poisonous spider native to Virginia. Only the female Black Widow Spider will bite, and only if she feels that she or her egg sack are under attack. She will usually try to escape first. Female black widow spiders are shiny and black all over, with a bright red or orange hourglass-shape on their underside. They can be up to 1½ inches long and spin a messy, irregular web. Males are smaller, less brightly colored, and harmless.

### Where do black widow spiders live?

Black Widow spiders are widespread in Virginia. They like dark, moist, and undisturbed places, especially: forested areas, rock walls, sheds, barns, woodpiles, under porches, inside meter boxes, basements, etc. In fall, they may seek the warmth of indoors or may be accidentally carried inside with firewood.

### BLACK WIDOW SPIDER BITE: What are the symptoms?

Some victims describe the bite as a sharp pain, like a bee sting. Many victims do not feel the spider bite them at all. Symptoms usually develop within a few hours and may include:

- Redness and swelling at the site of the bite
- Headache
- Sweating
- Nausea, vomiting
- Anxiety
- Severe muscle pain or cramping, especially in the legs or abdomen.
- Rarely, symptoms may also include chest pain or difficulty breathing.

Very small children and the elderly are most at risk for serious health problems. Death from a black widow bite is extremely rare.



### SPIDER BITE: What to do

- Remember: Black widow spider bites are very treatable. Death from a bite is extremely rare. Stay calm!
- Wash the bite with soap & water.
- Call the Blue Ridge Poison Center toll free: 1-800-222-1222. The poison specialists will help you decide whether you need to seek medical treatment.

**PREVENTION:** Always wear gloves and long sleeves when carrying firewood or working in places where Black Widows are known to live. Look before placing your hands in crevices or dark areas.



**Caution: Black widow spiders may live in your wood pile. Wear gloves and long sleeves when handling firewood or working in known spider habitats.**