



# Student Health Center

## UNC Wilmington

### INSTRUCTION SHEET: WHOLE BODY REACTION TO FIRE ANT BITES

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed a whole-body allergic reaction to fire ant bites. Fire ant bites most often cause only a local reaction: temporary swelling, discomfort, and redness at the bite sites. Rarely, a whole-body allergic reaction occurs; the reaction is serious, and must be treated aggressively; shock and even death can result if the reaction is not reversed.

Your allergic reaction has been successfully controlled at the Student Health Center. Continuing treatment at home is necessary to prevent the reaction from coming back.

#### MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR FIRE ANT REACTION:

- 1- Rest at home.
- 2- Continue diphenhydramine (Benadryl), 25 mg, 1 or 2 every 4 to 6 hours, to help minimize the reaction. Take the medicine at least 4 times a day for 24 hours. After 24 hours, titrate the diphenhydramine to control your symptoms: Take 25 or 50 mg, 4 to 6 times a day, depending on how much itching and rash you have. Diphenhydramine is available over-the-counter. The main side effect is drowsiness, so do not drive, operate machinery, climb a ladder, etc., while taking the medicine. Stop the diphenhydramine when your itching and rash are gone.
- 3- The provider may prescribe other medication to counter the reaction. Take this medication as directed.
- 4- Should symptoms of serious, whole-body allergic reaction reappear (chances are small), go immediately to the nearest emergency department. Specifically, seek attention if you develop: whole-body rash and itching, difficulty breathing (wheezing, noise on breathing in), or become shocky (pale, sweating, fainting, lightheaded, confused, etc.).
- 5- Should you later develop infection in the bite wounds, return promptly to the Student Health Center. Normally, a tiny, fluid-filled blister forms at the site of each bite within a day or two; the fluid in the blisters may be clear or white. The blisters look much like chicken-pox blisters. Signs of infection include: pus draining from a bite site, increasing redness/swelling/warmth around the wound, or red streaks spreading from the wound.
- 6- Realize you are highly allergic to fire ants. Avoid fire ants if possible. Have someone else take steps to eradicate fire ants in your yard. Strongly consider having an allergic reaction kit immediately available for self-treatment. The Student Health Center may prescribe such a kit, or you can schedule a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor to receive instructions and a prescription for a kit.