

# INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT: SPIDERS



Spiders are arachnids that have eight legs and two body parts, the head and abdomen. Spiders are beneficial predators (see *Glossary*) of pests such as mosquitoes and house flies. Most spiders are harmless. The few spiders that might hurt humans, such as black widows, spend most of their time hidden under woodpiles or in crevices. Brown recluse spiders do not live in California.

## When are spiders a problem?

Children are very curious, and typically play on the floor or ground, which puts them at a higher risk for rare encounters with spiders. Spiders usually leave people alone unless provoked, and almost all supposed spider bites are actually from mosquitoes, biting flies, or fleas.

Spiders do not transmit diseases. Only a few have jaws strong enough to bite through skin, and even fewer can inject toxins that may cause illness. Certain spider bites can sicken young children due to the children's small body size and weight. A serious infection, Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), is not a spider bite but is often mistaken for one. Only a health care provider can diagnose MRSA.

## Where are spiders found?

Most spiders, such as the cellar spider and common house spider, are harmless and often found in corners of a house, basement, or garage where they make their cobwebs.

## Black widow spiders

Black widow spiders are common in California. The female has a shiny black body with an orange-red hourglass shape on the bottom of her abdomen. Her body is usually less than ½-inch long, about the size of your thumbnail. Male black widow spiders are smaller than females and lighter in color. Their mouthparts are too small to bite humans.



Black widows are most active in the warmer months. They live in dark, warm, dry, and sheltered areas such as garages, sheds, wood piles, stone piles, and hollow wood stumps. They're found under play structures, in hollow areas of children's toys, and under picnic tables and benches, especially in corners.

Black widow bites are painless or may feel like a pinprick. They can cause flu-like symptoms for a few days, or in some cases, painful muscle spasms. If someone is bitten, apply an ice pack, and contact a health care professional or the California Poison Control System at (800) 222-1222. If your symptoms are severe, seek immediate care from a health care provider.

## IPM Strategies

Most spiders are beneficial and harmless to humans. Since spiders eat other pests, try to leave them alone, especially if you find them outdoors. If you need to remove a spider indoors, use an empty container and slide a stiff piece of paper over the container's top or use a vacuum to remove a spider and its web.

### 1 KEEP SPIDERS OUT

- ▶ Install or fix screens and keep doors closed.
- ▶ Minimize hiding places by having moveable furniture and cleaning up clutter.
- ▶ Seal cracks in the foundation and install door sweeps to keep spiders from entering.

### 2 REMOVE SPIDERS' FOOD, WATER, AND SHELTER

- ▶ Use yellow light bulbs outdoors. Yellow light is slightly less attractive to flying insects that are food for spiders.
- ▶ Vacuum, dust, and sweep regularly.
- ▶ Keep vegetation, especially ivy, at least 12 inches away from the building's foundation.

[IPM Strategies continued]

**3 MONITOR**

- ▶ Indoors, spiders are commonly found in undisturbed areas such as dark corners and crevices where they make webs. Indoor cobwebs are an indication of where spiders are hiding.
- ▶ Not every web houses a spider. Once a web is abandoned, another spider doesn't move in.
- ▶ Check outdoor playground equipment, benches, and picnic tables for spiders and webs.

**4 GET RID OF SPIDERS**

- ▶ Traps and insecticides don't work to manage spiders. Spraying is not recommended because it leaves residues that may harm children and the environment. Spraying will only work if you are able to directly spray the spider.
- ▶ A less toxic way to manage spiders is simply to move them outside, vacuum them up, or crush them with your shoe or a rolled up piece of paper.
  - ▷ To remove individual spiders, place a container over them and slip a stiff piece of paper underneath to seal off the opening. Then, take the spider outside.
  - ▷ To remove cobwebs from ceilings and corners, use a vacuum, duster, or a cobweb brush (such as a Webster which extends to over 5 feet long).

**ACTION PLAN FOR SPIDERS**

| WHEN TO TAKE ACTION  | NONPESTICIDE PRACTICES   | LAST RESORT  |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ When you see spiders or webs in your home.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Keep your home clean.</li> <li>▶ Trap individual spiders in a jar or container and release outside.</li> <li>▶ Use a cobweb brush or vacuum to remove the spiders and cobwebs.</li> <li>▶ Screen windows.</li> <li>▶ Seal cracks and openings.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Consult with a pest management professional (PMP) if spiders are a concern after regularly using a cobweb brush and vacuum cleaner. A PMP can spray spiders directly only as a temporary solution. PMPs can also apply dusts containing silica gel and pyrethrins, which may be useful in certain indoor situations.</li> </ul> |

**RESOURCES**

• University of California Statewide IPM Program: *Spiders*  
[www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7442.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7442.html)

• Our Water, Our World: Living with Spiders, The Helpful Hunters  
[www.cleanwaterprogram.org/uploads/Spiders101.pdf](http://www.cleanwaterprogram.org/uploads/Spiders101.pdf)

California Childcare Health Program, University of California, San Francisco School of Nursing • [cchp.ucsf.edu](http://cchp.ucsf.edu)



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