

Advice for schools

PHE has been made aware of school closures in Newham due to reported infestations of false widow spiders.

It is normal to see more spiders at this time of year as they come indoors for warmth.

False widow spiders are native to the UK, and are common in Southern England. They are most active at night; during the day they tend to remain within or near their webs.

Spider bites are rare in the UK. The false widow spider can bite, but does this only if provoked or disturbed. Although they are mildly venomous, venom is rarely used in a bite. The bites leave small puncture marks on the skin, and cause localised pain and swelling. Pain from a false widow spider bite is similar to that of a bee or wasp sting, and usually resolves one to 12 hours after the bite. More significant problems are associated with secondary infections than with the bite itself.

If you come across a false widow spider, avoid handling it or disturbing its web. If you are bitten, clean the bite with soap and water to prevent it from becoming infected.

It may seem unpleasant to have more spiders than usual inside the school, but they do not pose a significant public health risk. As with all spider species, eradication treatment cannot ensure that the spiders will not return to the building.

Dr Deborah Turbitt, Deputy Director for PHE London, said:

“If you have been bitten, gently wash the affected area with soap and water. Cold packs and simple oral painkillers may be useful if bites are painful. If symptoms don't respond to these measures, there is severe swelling, or the bite is around the eyes, do seek medical attention.”

For further advice on insect bites and stings, click here <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/bites-and-stings/Pages/insects-bugs-that-bite-sting.aspx>

References

British Arachnological Society

http://britishspiders.org.uk/wiki2015/index.php?title=False_Widow_Spiders

NHS advice, Insect bites and stings

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insect-bites-and-stings/symptoms/>

Natural History Museum, Fact sheet: false widow spiders – Steatoda spp 2014

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/natureplus/community/identification/blog/2014/12/23/fact-sheet-false-widow-spiders--steatoda-spp.html>

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4th October 2018