

## IPM IN SCHOOLS

## October



Mark Chappell



Joseph Berger

Medically important spiders of the Pacific Northwest. Left: Black widow spider (female); right; Yellow sac spider.

### Spider Identification

- A **female black widow** is shiny black with a red hourglass under the abdomen. The marking can also be yellowish-orange and its shape can vary. An adult female's body is about half an inch long. Males are much smaller and cannot break human skin.
- A **yellow sac spider** has a body that is about a quarter- to a half-inch long. They are yellow, white, or greenish.

### What to do if a bite is suspected

Accurate ID is important.

If possible, capture the spider by placing a container over it. Slide a stiff card between the surface and the spider, invert and tap to knock the spider into the container. Seal with a lid. Put the container in the freezer overnight.

Contact your school or district's pest management professionals or your local extension office for help with ID.

**Spiders** are useful predators, feeding on pests such as mosquitoes, flies, and moths. Most spiders are harmless to humans; however, they can be a nuisance indoors. Spiders typically enter buildings either by being carried in on items or by crawling through cracks and crevices. If you have insect problems, spiders are almost certain to follow.

### Arachnids of the Pacific Northwest

Only two spider species in Washington are considered medically important. Both are most commonly found east of the Cascades and also occur in Western Washington.

- **Black widow spiders** are shy spiders, despite their frightening reputation. The female black widow's venom can be a health risk for the very young, elderly, or those with high blood pressure. They tend to bite only when threatened but will then defend themselves. They prefer dry, dark places like crawl spaces, corners of garages, stacks of flower pots, and lumber piles. The female black widow builds a messy web with very strong, sticky silk.
- **Yellow sac spiders** are primarily garden-dwellers but frequently venture indoors, where they climb along walls and near the ceiling. At night, they may become trapped in bedding or in clothing left on the floor, leading to bites when they are disturbed. The bite is sometimes reported to be painful and may cause an allergic reaction.

Other arachnids to know about:

- **Jumping spiders** are active and curious hunters but are not a threat to humans.
- **Orbweavers** like to build their webs near light sources to capture night-flying insects.
- **Aggressive house spiders** ("hobo spiders") are not considered dangerous.
- **False black widow spiders** ("cupboard spiders") closely resemble female black widow spiders but do not have the hourglass shape on their abdomens.
- **Harvestmen** including **daddy-long-legs** are not considered spiders. Their mouthparts are not capable of penetrating human skin.
- **Brown recluse spiders** are not found in the Pacific Northwest.

Find more common spider information at [DOH's Spiders webpage](#) or [Common Spiders of Washington \(WSU Extension\)](#).

# What is Integrated Pest Management (IPM)?

[IPM](#) is a way to manage pests that focuses on prevention. IPM can achieve long-term pest prevention and control with minimal impact on human and environmental health. The key steps of IPM are: (1) **Inspect**; (2) **Identify** the problem or pest; (3) **Act** - take appropriate action; and (4) **Evaluate** the results. Pest prevention requires communication and education so that staff are aware of conditions that attract pests and know how to minimize them. Appropriate sanitation, proper food storage, clutter reduction, and minor changes to staff habits will minimize conditions that attract pests.

For more information, ask about your school or district's pest management plan and IPM policy.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Teach students to not tease or poke at spiders and to not put their hands in dark crevices without looking first.
2. Maintain tight-fitting window screens. Seal cracks and crevices, including around doors. Brush-type doorsweeps are effective at excluding insects and other pests.



3. Store food products in secure containers with tight-fitting lids. Keep classrooms free of food debris and keep areas under sinks clean and dry. These tactics will help discourage insect pests that spiders may use as prey.
4. Vacuum regularly, including under and behind furniture and in unused corners.
5. Do not store containers, shoes, clothing, or toys on the floor, as spiders may become trapped in these items.
6. Check items brought in from outside storage sheds or garages for spiders or egg sacs.
7. Turn off indoor lights at night to avoid attracting insects to the windows.
8. Pesticides are **not** an effective solution for long-term spider management.
9. Spider bites are not common. Many skin wounds like those from MRSA and herpes are misdiagnosed as spider bites.
10. **If a wound that might be a spider bite is found**, wash the wound site with soap and water. Cold packs may help relieve initial symptoms and discomfort. Consult a doctor. Symptoms of a black widow bite include headache, general body aches, nausea, shortness of breath, intense muscle pain, and rigidity of the abdomen and legs. **If a black widow bite is suspected, seek medical help!**



Outdoors: Keep areas next to buildings free of trash, wood piles, leaf litter, and vegetation. Yellow spectrum lighting near doorways can reduce the presence of insects and spiders in those spaces.

## More Information:

- University of California Statewide IPM Program. <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/pmg/pestnotes/pn7442.html>
- Washington Department of Health (DOH): Schools - Enhance Safe and Healthy Environments. <https://doh.wa.gov/schoolenvironment>  
Email: [schoolehs@doh.wa.gov](mailto:schoolehs@doh.wa.gov)
- Environmental Protection Agency: Managing Pests in Schools. <https://www.epa.gov/ipm>
- The National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) provides objective, science-based information about pesticides and related topics to enable people to make informed decisions. <http://npic.orst.edu>  
Email: [npic@ace.orst.edu](mailto:npic@ace.orst.edu)  
Phone: 800-858-7378

## Written in collaboration with:

Alexandra Boris, WA DOH  
Liz Dykstra, WA DOH  
Jennifer Snyder, UPEST