



Public Health
England



FALSE WIDOW SPIDER: PUBLIC INFORMATION

Spider sightings

Sightings of false widow spiders mostly occur between July and November. The false widow spider is common in London and the South East, and reasonably widespread across the South West, East Anglia, the Midlands, and Ireland. False widow spiders tend to remain within or near their webs.

False widow bites

Spider bites are rare in the UK. The false widow spider can bite, although the bite is mildly venomous, may leave small puncture marks on the skin and can cause localised pain and swelling. Pain from a false widow spider bite is like that of a bee or wasp sting and usually resolves one to 12 hours after the bite. Some people experience symptoms such as headaches and nausea, which typically resolve within two to three days. More significant problems may occur if the bite becomes infected.

Managing spiders in schools or at home

It may seem unpleasant to have more spiders around than usual, but they do not pose a significant public health risk. Eradication treatment (usually involving fumigation with a chemical harmful to spiders and insects) does not offer a long-term solution. It is likely that the false widow spider will return to the building within months, and the eradication of other species of spider will provide them with more spaces to inhabit.

The risks involved in eradication treatment are far greater than those posed by the spiders themselves. Of greatest significance are the impacts of school closures: disruption to education, loss of school meals to children who rely on them, and the need for alternative childcare. There is also the personal health risk to those undertaking or coming into contact with fumigation products.

If you come across a false widow spider, avoid handling it or disturbing its web. If you are bitten, the bite should be cleaned with soap and water. Ice packs and oral painkillers can be used to manage pain or discomfort. Medical attention should be immediately sought if there is severe swelling, or you are feeling faint, feverish or generally "unwell", with cramping and/or sweating, or symptoms of an allergic reaction.

Further information

NHS advice on insect bites and stings:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/insect-bites-and-stings/

British Arachnological Society:

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

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

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