



Integrated Pest Management (IPM) of Yellowjackets in Early Childhood Education (ECE) Settings

Yellowjackets are wasps. Although sometimes called “meat bees,” they aren’t bees at all. Yellowjackets are important because they eat large numbers of caterpillars, house flies and other pest insects. But when yellowjackets attempt to find food or defend their nests near humans, there can be problems.

Why are yellowjackets a problem in ECE settings?

Yellowjackets can be a problem in child care, especially in the summer and fall, when they sometimes sting children and child care providers. Yellowjackets can be persistent and aggressive in their search for food and their presence can cause fear in children who have been stung or seen others stung. Yellowjackets may sting humans when they are swatted away from food or when their nest is disturbed. In a yellowjacket colony, some members have the job of defending the nest. If the nest is threatened, these individuals will defend it vigorously, and can sting repeatedly (honey bees sting only once).

To avoid being stung by yellowjackets

- Do not keep attractive foods such as sugary drinks, ripe fruit, meat, pet food, or open garbage outside near play areas.
- If a nest is disturbed, leave the area as quickly as possible.
- Avoid going barefoot outside in vegetation, especially clover and blooming ground covers.

If a child is bitten by a yellowjacket, move the child to a safe area to avoid more stings. Allergic reactions to yellowjacket stings can develop anywhere on the body. Yellowjacket stings can cause reactions that range from short-term, intense feelings of pain to swelling and tenderness with some itching, to life-threatening allergic responses that require emergency care. Non-life-threatening reactions may

include hives, swelling, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and headaches. Symptoms can occur immediately after a sting, or may take longer to appear. They can last for several hours. If you are stung:

- Wash with soap and water
- Apply ice to the area to reduce the pain and swelling
- Apply a baking soda–water paste to reduce itchiness
- Call 911 if you show signs of a severe allergic reaction to the sting such as difficulty breathing or dizziness.

Unlike honey bees, yellowjackets rarely leave a stinger embedded in the skin.

Yellowjacket characteristics and habits



Yellowjackets are yellow and black. Yellowjacket nests look like papery gray balls and are most commonly built in holes in the ground, such as rodent burrows. They may also be attached to the eaves

of buildings, undersides of decks, or tree branches. They also make their nests in empty spaces in the walls and ceilings of buildings.

Yellowjacket nests are started in the spring by the queen. From spring to midsummer the young yellowjackets in the nest are growing and require large amounts of protein for food. The worker yellowjackets forage mainly for protein for the youngsters during this time, usually in the form of other insects. By late summer, yellowjackets have become sugar-craving adults and scavenge for sweet food:

- At picnics and barbecues
- Around garbage cans
- Where ripe or overripe fruit is present.

In mild climate areas of California, some yellow-jacket colonies survive for several years and become quite large.

IPM strategies for yellowjackets

These are things you can do to reduce problems with yellowjackets in child care:

Make your facility less attractive to yellow jackets

It is best to prevent problems in the first place by:

- **Removing or containing food sources:**
 - *Keep food sources away from yellowjackets.* Once food is discovered, they will continue to hunt around that location long after the food has been removed.
 - *Keep foods and drinks, including pet food, covered or inside.*
 - *Keep garbage in tightly sealed garbage cans (use trash bags in all containers).*
 - *Consider using wasp-proof garbage cans; the best ones have domed-topped, spring-hinged lids.*
 - *Empty trash daily* inside and out and replace liners.
 - *Tightly cover* recycling bins and clean them daily.
- **Eliminating nesting sites:**
 - *Plug up rodent burrows.*
 - *Seal holes and cracks in foundations, walls, roofs, and eaves that yellowjackets might use for building their nests.*

Trapping

Baited traps can reduce the number yellowjackets in your environment but will not eliminate them. They will not be very effective if other food sources are available. Trapping needs to be started in the spring and continued into summer and fall, especially if the yellowjacket population was large the previous year. Do not place traps near locations where children play or eat. They may attract yellowjackets to these areas. There are two kinds of traps:

- **Lure traps** are available for purchase and easiest to use. They work best as queen traps in late winter/spring. In spring there is a 30- to 45-day period when new queens first emerge before they build nests. Each queen trapped at this time represents one less nest of 500 to 5,000 yellowjackets in the summer and fall.

- **Water traps** These do-it-yourself traps attract queens as well as workers. Bait such as lunch meat or fish is suspended over soapy water. As yellow-jackets swoop over the water, they'll seize scraps of the bait, fly downward as the bait weighs them down, and unintentionally plunge into the water and drown. For information on building these traps go to <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7450.html>

Removing the nest

If you locate an active nest near your facility, it should be treated. Likewise, if the yellowjacket population persists after removing attractive food and trapping, it may be necessary to locate and treat the nest. It is strongly recommended that you call for professional help with treatment of a yellowjacket nest. In some areas, the local Mosquito and Vector Control District may be available to treat nests. To determine if this service is available in your area, call the California Mosquito and Vector Control Association at (916) 440-0826. If this service is not available, call a commercial pest control company.

Resources

University of California Statewide IPM Program: www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7450.html

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation, IPM in Child Care website: <http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/childcare/>

EPA Integrated Pest Management for Schools: A How-to Manual, Chapter 19: Yellowjackets and hornets in schools
www.epa.gov/opp00001/ipm/schoolipm/chap-19.pdf

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