EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION OF THE STANDARD RECOMMENDATIONS GIVEN BY PHYSICIANS TO VENOM-ALLERGIC PATIENTS REGARDING FORAGING HYMENOPTERA.

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Physicians give advice to patients with life-threatening allergies to Hymenoptera venom regarding avoidance of defensive stings from foraging bees and wasps. Some of these recommendations are in contrast to recommendations given by the USDA and other organizations that employ entomologists: avoid wearing bright colors, floral patterns, and perfume that might attract foraging insects. A controlled field trial was conducted using 100 assessments in a factorial design to assess the influence of visual cues (bright, floral pattern vs. dark, no pattern) and olfactory cues (presence vs. absence of perfume) on the propensity of foraging Hymenoptera to alight upon clothing in field locations haphazardly chosen around New Orleans, LA over the summer of 2009. Although not statistically significant, Hymenoptera more often alighted on clothing that was dark (Fisher's exact $P=0.44$) and without perfume ($P=0.11$). The only social insects that made contact with clothing were a single honey bee and a single paper wasp despite heavy foraging activity. This study fails to support the current recommendations that discourage use of perfume or bright, floral-patterned clothing in patients with hypersensitivity to Hymenoptera venom. The discrepancies between human and insect senses of vision and scent likely account for these results. Consideration should be given to withdrawing these recommendations for venom-allergic patients.