

Blandford Fly - Insect Bites



The Blandford Fly

The Blandford fly is a 2-3mm blood sucking black fly, which gives a nasty and painful bite during the summer months, particularly in May and June when breeding. The flies are typically found near areas of water and there has been a recent marked increase in the number of people severely affected by these bites in this area, both rural and urban (possibly due to water features in gardens). The insects fly less than 0.5m from the ground, resulting in bites to the lower limbs that cause small to large blisters (up to 22cm diameter) and purple (haemorrhagic) lesions, with intensely painful stabbing sensations. The saliva of the fly often causes severe local irritation, spreading redness swelling (oedema), pain, joint pain and even high temperature of 38°C (100F) and over, depending on your level of sensitivity. Local reactions can last for several days or longer, but can be symptomatically treated by over-the-counter products, e.g. oral antihistamines, analgesics from your local pharmacy. Antibiotics are rarely needed, although scratching the irritated areas can rupture the skin, leading to secondary infections.

To avoid being bitten by the Blandford fly

1. Cover up. Wear clothing (without holes) that fully covers the legs down to the ankles. Wear socks.
2. Apply a quality insect repellent (containing DEET), especially when near rivers, streams, grassland areas (not forgetting when near water features in gardens).
3. Avoid swarms of insects.
4. Protect children and babies with an insect net when in prams and pushchairs.

What to do if bitten by the Blandford fly?

1. Clean the bite wound with soap and water, then gently pat dry (avoid rubbing the area).
2. Do not scratch the bite as this will spread the fly saliva and may lead to infection.
3. Apply a cold compress or ice pack to reduce swelling and pain.
4. Take oral antihistamines (e.g. cetirizine, loratadine, chlorphenamine) ALWAYS READ THE LABEL.
5. Take analgesics (e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen), if in pain or discomfort. ALWAYS READ THE LABEL.
6. Hydrocortisone can be applied locally to reduce inflammation, and a local anaesthetic (e.g. lidocaine) can help pain relief. Creams and sprays will be easier and less painful to apply than ointments. ALWAYS READ THE LABEL.
7. Antihistamine creams and sprays are not recommended, as they may cause skin reactions.
8. Cover large blisters with a dry, non adhering dressing.
9. For swelling (oedema) in the ankle and feet, elevate and rest legs for a few days.

Seek medical help (Visit a local community pharmacy offering the Pharmacy First service, phone 111 or see a GP) for: discomfort, swelling or red lines in the groin or armpits; a persistent high fever; spreading redness or hotness around the bite (longer than 3 days).

Seek immediate help (phone 999) for: wheezing or problems breathing; swelling of the face or tongue; dizziness; nausea; chest pain – this could be anaphylaxis requiring immediate medical treatment.