

# Hobo Spider

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Only two poisonous spiders that present a danger in terms of their bite occur in western Montana: the Aggressive House (**HOBO**) spider and the Black Widow spider.

The Aggressive House (**HOBO**) spider, *Tegenaria agrestis*, is called such because it may bite with little provocation and because it moves forward to attack when cornered or threatened.

**The BITE:** **HOBO** spider bites can produce skin injuries, or lesions, similar to those produced by the brown recluse (which is NOT found in this area.) Therefore, ulcerated lesions of this type are probably due to bites by the aggressive house spider.

Bites commonly occur when working in areas where spiders love to build their webs (dark and secluded places like crawl spaces, basements, shrubbery, rock gardens, wood and/or rock piles). Bites can also occur when putting on an article of clothing that has been left on the floor (this is another desired spider habitat.) Although not known to be climbers, bites do occur in the bed as the spiders can crawl up bedding that is floor length.

**Bites can be prevented by making sure that bedding is at least 8 inches above the floor and the bed itself is 8 inches from walls that have a porous surface.** The initial bite is not painful and has been described as producing a very slight prick sensation. However, a small, insensitive, hard area appears within 30 minutes or less, and is surrounded by an expanding reddened area of 2 inches to 6 inches in diameter. Within 15 to 35 hours, the area blisters. About 24 hours later the blisters usually break, and the wound oozes serum.

Lesions may take several months to heal, and frequently leave a permanent scar.

Bites by *Tegenaria agrestis* have not caused a death. However, a person bitten by one of these spiders should seek immediate medical attention.

**HABITAT:** **HOBO** spiders are commonly called funnel web spiders as they

build funnel-shaped webs within practically any habitat that has holes, cracks or crevasses to support the tunnel formation. The funnel is open at both ends, and the web expands outward into a broad, slightly-curved sheet. When prey (insects) becomes entangled in the web, vibrations alert the spider which dashes out to bite.

**These spiders are poor climbers so are rarely seen above ground level.** But they are one of the most common spiders found in houses (basements, closets, behind furniture, on window sills), and in garages.

**DESCRIPTION:** *Tegenaria agrestis* is a relatively large, swift-running spider. Mature adults range from 1 to 1.5 inches in diameter, including legs. As with most spiders, males can be identified readily by the expanded, swollen tips of their palps

**Sexually-mature males and females are abundant from late June through fall.** During this period, males tend to wander long distances in search of females. Eggs are laid into a spherical silken sack spun by the female, usually in September or October. The sac is then placed within or adjacent to the funnel, usually on the underside of a rock or other object. The sac is then covered with a thin layer of soil, wood chips, or other debris, including prey. The debris-coated sac is then often covered with another layer of silk. Eggs hatch the following spring.

Most *Tegenaria* molt about ten times over a span of two years before reaching sexual maturity. Immatures are commonly found wandering in the spring searching for webs.

**CONTROL:** All spiders are *beneficial!* They catch and eat nuisance insects such as flies, ants, aphids, plant-feeding bugs, cock-roaches, small grasshoppers and crickets, thrips, leafhoppers, whiteflies and mosquitos. They are also excellent indicators of carpenter ant infestations as their webs are commonly near the house where ants forage, and become trapped. While elimination of some spiders is acceptable, **wholesale elimination is ecologically unsound and can result in more Hobo spiders since the single most effective deterrent against them is the presence of competing spiders!**

**Cultural:** The best method of control for *Tegenaria* is that of prevention. Prime habitat, such as tall or matted grass next to the house, should be cut and/or

removed and replaced with at least a 12-inch gravel edging. Cracks and deep cavities in rock walls should be filled with soil or cement. Lumber and firewood piles should be modified to eliminate cavities. Holes in the walls of the house for pipes or electrical lines should be sealed, as should the holes resulting from broken windows or screens, and ill-fitting doors. Always inspect firewood for spiders and their egg sacs.

Once a spider is in the house, the best elimination is to crush the spider with a newspaper or flyswatter. Spiders found in sinks or bath tubs can be killed with hot water. Another good method for elimination is to vacuum the spiders and then immediately dispose of the dust bag by sealing it inside a plastic bag.

**Traps:** Traps can be effective in reducing the amount of spiders in your home. Sticky traps are sold at local hardware stores. The attractant appears as a blue dash in the sticky center of the trap surface. Old traps that have been stored under hot conditions may not be very effective.

You can make your own trap using a small box (about 2 x8 inches) with two ends open and applying Tangletrap (or some other sticky material) to the bottom and sides. Traps should be placed in basements, crawl spaces, along walls or passage ways from the outdoors where the spiders are most apt to be. **Place the traps in June and change them every two months while spiders are visible.** The only problem is that females rarely wander. Therefore, only males in search of mates and immatures in search of a web site will be caught.

## **Insecticides**

If spiders are numerous and constantly entering the house, insecticides labeled for spiders are available on the market.

However, according to research, insecticides are not particularly effective on the HOBO spiders. Carbaryl (Sevin) or Cyfluthrin (Tempo) is the recommended materials to use.

The best time to apply the insecticide for HOBO spiders is LATE JUNE through JULY. Pesticide application after that time is the LEAST EFFECTIVE. Do not exceed the recommended dosage as written on the label. These materials are

probably best applied along baseboards, door casements, and corners, and then *only* where spiders are present. But spraying the house foundation perimeter *before* spiders begin to move indoors is the preferred control option.

Malathion or carbaryl can be used outside around the foundation of the house.

Only one application of insecticide may not be as effective as needed. If you are seeing large numbers outside the home, reapply. The efficacy of insecticides is greater in small, enclosed areas such as crawl spaces.

### **Firewood Management**

Bora Care (sodium *octaborate*) or Green Thumb Termite Killer (*chlorpyrifos*) are products currently registered for use on firewood; however, do not breathe smoke from treated wood!

The best protection is to wear gloves and a heavy, long-sleeved shirt when handling firewood or debris that may harbor spiders. Adult spiders in an outdoor woodpile should die over the cold winter months.

#### INFORMATION TAKEN FROM:

*Biology & Medical Importance of the Aggressive House Spider in the PNW*

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