



TIPS FOR CATERPILLAR SEASON

Unfortunately, as the weather become warmer, our annual visit is at hand earlier than usual this year. That's right, the Caterpillars are back! Here are a few things we should all be aware of when walking on campus.

Each year the oak trees on our campuses become infested with the Buck Moth Caterpillars, and although they have a particular fondness for the oaks, they are not as picky as we may want them to be. Any large shady tree in the area is a potential buffet for our spiny little friends, and they don't like to be interrupted. The more they eat, the heavier they become and that is when they fall off of the branches and start looking for dinner parties near by.

Everyone please be mindful of bags, tools, carts, supplies, shoes or anything else placed on or near areas where the caterpillars may be congregating. During the early stages, caterpillars are very small and have a cotton-like appearance; although they may look cute and cuddly, they pack a painful sting that can last for 24 hours. The larger adult versions are big, ugly and not known for their Southern hospitality, so try to avoid them. As long as we are conscious of them, they are easily avoidable. When possible, try to use our covered walkways.

What should I do if I find one on my bag, clothes, or person?

First: Don't panic! The last thing you want to do is grab it bare-handed. The spine-like hairs are attached to glands that secrete a substance when touched or broken regardless of what, where, or who they are stuck to. These spines are primarily on the anterior portion or "top" of the caterpillar, so as the caterpillar strolls across the surface, its underside doesn't do the damage.

Second: Don't panic. Shake it off or push it away from the area using a sheet of paper, gloved hand, notebook, shoe or something that will keep it from coming into contact with the surface of your skin.

Third: Once you have escaped the sting and realize that the caterpillar is crawling away from you, keep in mind that it is completely exposed and vulnerable, and then let your conscience be your guide.

What should we do if I am stung?

First: Don't panic, and don't grab it bare handed. See the pattern? A Buck Moth Caterpillar sting is relative to a bee sting, but just lasts longer. You should expect an initial burning sensation with some inflammation and swelling at the site that usually lasts an hour or two but can last up to 24 hours depending on the severity and amount of contact. ****Only those with severe allergies to insect stings have a slight chance of experiencing nausea or respiratory problems.****

Second: Don't Panic. Wash the area immediately with cool water and look for any of the spiny hairs that may still be there. If you see some, a good piece of scotch tape across the site is recommended and should pull out any remaining residue.

Third: An ice pack on the area can limit the swelling and ease the pain, and Tylenol is an option when an icepack just doesn't do it. Some articles also mention Cortisone and anti-itch creams, though sometimes question their medicinal value.

Ultimately, these caterpillars are part of our summers, so please be alert as you go about your daily routines. If anyone has any questions, feel free to contact Stephen Monnerjahn, Health Services Coordinator, at (504) 671-6009.