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Dear Doctors,

**Suspected Sighting of Red Fire Ants in Hong Kong**

As you may be aware, locations with suspected traces of red fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta Buren*) have been found by Agriculture, Fisheries & Conservation Department (AFCD) officers recently. These locations include the Hong Kong Wetland Park area, Yeung Uk Tsuen, the Airport area, and the Sheung Yue River. AFCD is continuing to check for affected sites throughout Hong Kong.

Red fire ants are very aggressive and readily attack anything that disturbs them. Unlike bees, red fire ants can sting repeatedly. However, they will not transmit diseases through their stings. Stings from red fire ants can cause painful, burning and itching sensation, which can last for hours. The sensation produced by multiple stings is that the body appears to be on fire; hence, the name fire ant. A red swelling with a small blister will form at the site of each sting. For most persons, the wounds will heal in 10-14 days. They can become itchy while healing and are prone to secondary infection if broken. On rare occasions, red fire ant stings can cause severe acute allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) which can be fatal. The symptoms of anaphylaxis include rapid onset of flushing, general hives, swelling of the face, eyes or throat, chest pain, nausea, severe sweating, breathing difficulties and faintness.

Treatment is mainly supportive and symptomatic, including the prevention of infection, and medications for pain and itchiness. No specific anti-venom is available for treatment of red fire ant sting. People who show symptoms of anaphylaxis require emergency medical attention.



Patients suspected to be stung by red fire ants should be advised on the following or in severe cases, referred to the Accident and Emergency Department for further management:

- Apply a cold compress as soon as possible to the skin to relieve the swelling and pain
- Gently wash the affected areas with soap and water and leave the blisters intact
- Do not scratch the blisters

Sighting of any anthill or small mound of dirt with swarms of active ants nearby can be reported to the Plant and Pesticides Regulatory Division of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department at 2150 7000. For more information, please visit the Centre for Health Protection's website at <http://www.chp.gov.hk>.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr Thomas TSANG)

Consultant Community Medicine (Communicable Disease)  
Surveillance and Epidemiology Branch  
Centre for Health Protection