

# Working with Insects

## Health Protection

- Persons working with insects are at risk of developing allergic reactions to insect frass and scales. Insects with a scaly or hairy cuticle are a greater risk than insects with a soft cuticle. Microscopic fragments become airborne through insect movement or through handling cages or substrates and remain suspended in the room air. If these particles are inhaled they can stimulate an allergic response in some individuals. This most often causes nuisance conditions such as allergic conjunctivitis, rhinitis or eczema but potentially exposure can also cause more serious, and occasionally, life threatening conditions such as asthma. Once developed, asthma may remain a problem even if the person ceases to work with insects.
- It is not possible to predict who will run into these sorts of problems. Everyone working with insects must consider themselves vulnerable. The risk of becoming sensitised – the first stage in the development of allergy – is related to exposure: the greater the degree of exposure, the higher the likelihood of sensitivity developing. Once an allergic response is established this relationship no longer holds – serious allergic reactions can be provoked by even slight exposure to the allergic material.
- Individuals who already have a respiratory condition, like asthma and those who smoke may be at slightly greater risk of becoming sensitised.

## Control Measures

Please refer to the risk assessment relating to your area of work for the appropriate control measures to be used.

## Action if Symptoms Develop

If you think you are becoming allergic (see below for list of symptoms) to the insects with which you work, it is necessary to report this to your Manager/Supervisor who will refer you to the Occupational Health Service as soon as possible. An early assessment of the problem with specific advice on how you can further reduce or avoid exposure can prevent allergic problems from progressing. You will also obtain advice on appropriate treatment if this is considered necessary.

### *Symptoms of Allergy*

Allergic reactions can affect the eyes, the nose, the lungs and the skin. Symptoms usually occur at the time of exposure, but especially with asthmatic symptoms there may be a delay of some hours before these appear. The list below is not exhaustive:

#### **Eyes**

Itching, watering, redness, swollen eyelids

#### **Nose**

Itching, watering, sneezing

#### **Lungs**

Coughing, chest tightness, wheeze, difficulty in breathing

#### **Skin**

Itching, cracks, chapping, small blisters, weals or nettle rash.