

## Southern Black Widow

**Class:** Arachnida

**Order:** Araneae

**Family:** Theridiidae, comb-footed or cob weaver spiders

The Black Widow Spider is the only poisonous spider native to Virginia. Only the female Black Widow Spider will bite, but only if she feels that she or her egg sack are under attack. She will usually try to escape first.

**Size:**

Adult females have a full body length of approximately 1/2 inch (~1.25 cm) and a total leg span of approximately 1-1/2 inches (~4 cm) however, there is much variation in female size, particularly gravid (egg-carrying) females. The abdomen of a gravid female can be greater than 1/2 inch (~1.25 cm) in diameter.

Males are much smaller, often having a body length less than 1/4 inch (< 0.75 cm) and a leg span of approximately 1/2 inch (~1.25 cm).

**Color:**

The body is shiny black and the underside of the abdomen has orange-red marking on it strongly resembling an hourglass, although it is important to note that the hourglass is sometimes separated into two triangular parts..

**Description:**

The cephalothorax bears the head and legs. The abdomen is much larger than the cephalothorax. The spinnerets are attached to the rear end of the abdomen. On widow spiders, the spinnerets look like a cluster of small cones.

**Habitat:**

Black Widow spiders are widespread in Virginia. They like dark, moist, and undisturbed places, especially: forested areas, rock walls, sheds, barns, woodpiles, under porches, inside meter boxes, basements, etc. During fall, they may seek the warmth of indoors or may be accidentally carried inside with firewood.

The web of widow spiders is not the orderly, geometric web of the orb weavers and many other spiders, but a tangled mass or cobweb.

**Bite Symptoms:**

Some victims describe the bite as a sharp pain, like a bee sting. Many victims do not feel the spider bite them at all. Symptoms usually develop within a few hours and may include:

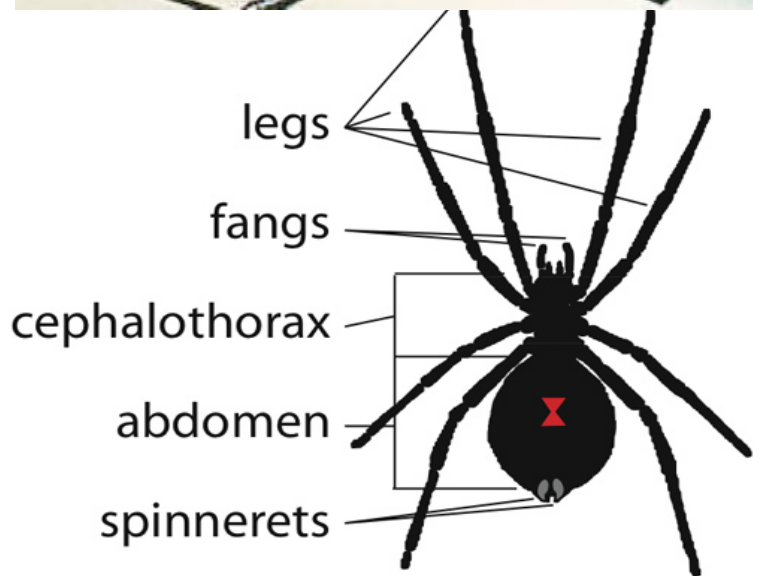
- Redness and swelling at the site of the bite
- Headache
- Sweating
- Nausea, vomiting
- Anxiety
- Severe muscle pain or cramping, especially in the legs or abdomen.

Rarely, symptoms may also include chest pain or difficulty breathing.

Very small children and the elderly are most at risk for serious health problems. Death from a black widow bite is extremely rare.



Female Southern Black Widow Spider



Male Southern Widow Spider