

Insect Stings and Bites

Children have a natural affinity with nature and they relish the experiences offered by the outdoors. Being naturally curious, most children will encounter the small world of insects and spiders – so bites and stings may occur.

Simple precautions may reduce the threat of insect bites and stings:

- Regularly check outdoor environment as a precaution
- Remove leaf litter, keep grass cut short and remove clover as it attracts bees
- Outdoor food should be covered
- No soft drink cans outside. Wasps are attracted to sweet drinks, and can crawl into soft drink cans and sting whoever drinks from the can
- Insect repellents should not be used on babies or toddlers, but may be used sparingly on children. It's advisable to test for a reaction on a small area of skin before use. Roll-ons are safer than aerosols, especially for young children. Avoid eyes and mouth and the parts of hands and fingers that may touch faces or go into mouth
- Educate children about the dangers of touching insects and spiders
- Keep poisons information sheet near the phone.

Many insect bites and stings cause short-term pain or discomfort and localised swelling, but most do not present a serious health threat and are treated by:

- Washing the affected area with soap and water – this reduces the likelihood of infection
- Applying a cold pack to help reduce swelling and itchiness
- If pain persists, the use of paracetamol can be discussed with a parent or a medical practitioner.

Some bites/stings can be more serious and immediate medical attention will be needed. If possible, it can be useful to take the dead insect



along for quick identification and appropriate medical response.

It is important to monitor a child who has been bitten or stung.

Carers should have a record of children who have known insect allergies, but even children who do not have a previous history of known allergy may experience an allergic response to a bite or sting.

Watch for symptoms that might indicate a severe allergic reaction, or anaphylaxis. These symptoms include one or more of the following:

- difficulty breathing
- swelling around the lips or eyes
- vomiting
- widespread rash
- dizziness or collapse.

Call 000 immediately for an ambulance if:

- any of the symptoms listed above appear
- if a child has previously had a severe allergic response to an insect bite or sting
- if the child has been stung in the mouth or throat.

For children with anaphylaxis, follow the child's emergency health management plan that may include administering Epipen.

The following information relates to some common stinging insects:

Wasps

Wasps are aggressive and can sting repeatedly, and the risk of an allergic response is increased if multiple stings occur. Apart from the danger of wasps crawling into soft-drink cans, wasps are attracted to sweet foods and meats, so extra care should be taken in supervising children eating these foods outside. Keep children away from wasp nests, as disturbed wasps are more aggressive.

Bee stings

Unlike wasps, bees can only sting once because they have a sting with barbs that remains in the skin. Stinging kills the bee, but the sting that remains contains poison (or venom). While it remains, more poison can be released, so it's important to remove the sting. Use your thumbnail to gently scrape the sting out – don't squeeze or pull as this will release more venom. Some children are allergic to bee stings so any child who is stung should be closely monitored.

Ants

Most ants bite, and some, including bull ants, are aggressive with very painful bites that cause localised swelling and intense itchiness. Cold packs may help relieve symptoms, but children should be closely monitored in case a more severe allergic reaction occurs.

Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes are particularly active in the evening and night and unprotected, sleeping children are especially vulnerable to mosquito bites. The bites cause itchiness and red lumps – sometimes with localised swelling,

especially if the bite is on the face. Applying a cold pack can relieve discomfort. Calamine lotion may also help.

Note: Mosquito bites can transmit serious diseases, – for example Ross River fever. In areas with a known threat of mosquito borne disease, extra care needs to be taken to protect children.

Caterpillars

The hairs from caterpillars can get into the skin and cause severe itching, but it is unlikely that treatment other than removing the hairs and applying a cold-pack will be needed. To remove hairs, press adhesive tape over the affected area, and carefully lift it off. Tweezers can also be used for individual hairs.

Note: If caterpillar hairs get into the eye, the child will need medical attention. Don't try to remove the hairs yourself.

Spiders

Most Australian spider bites are not life threatening. Funnel web and red-back bites are the exceptions and urgent medical help is needed for these bites. Bites from spiders can be very painful and may cause swelling. Some bites can become infected. If pain persists or infection occurs, seek medical attention.

References:

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/insect_bites

QIAS – Principles 5.2, 5.4, 6.6

FDCQA – Principles 4.3

OSHCQA – Principles 7.2

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