

Health Tips for Parents

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How do I treat a bug bite or sting?

Bug bites and stings usually cause momentary alarm, temporary discomfort and pain, but no serious or lasting health problems. However, some bites or stings may result in serious infections that require immediate treatment.



The severity of the reaction depends on your sensitivity to the insect venom or substance and whether you've been stung or bitten more than once, advises Piper Calasanti, MD, pediatrician, Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA.



Flea and bed-bug bites are typically not dangerous and usually cause local irritation or go unnoticed. Tick and mosquito bites usually only produce local swelling and itchiness, but should be monitored for a couple of days for any delayed reactions. Spider bites cause swelling and are usually harmless, unless caused by a black widow or brown recluse spider. Bee and wasp stings cause temporary redness, swelling and pain, but may also cause severe allergic reactions.

Prevention

Avoiding areas with stagnant water and wetlands where mosquitos and ticks are more common and staying away from spiders, bees and wasps – since they don't attack unless they feel threatened – may be the first step in prevention. When outdoors, in wooded areas for camping or hiking, wear tight fitting clothes, gloves, long sleeve shirts, and tuck pants into socks, to minimize skin exposure, says Dr. Calasanti.

Treatment

For mild reactions, immediately after being bitten or stung, wash area with soap and water and apply cold compress for 15 to 20 minutes. Antihistamines or topical creams will help to alleviate itching and lessen swelling, and acetaminophen can help relieve the pain. For more severe reactions, seek immediate medical assistance.

Mild allergic reactions

- Red bumps
- Itchiness
- Mild swelling

Severe allergic reactions

- Swelling of the face, tongue or mouth
- Difficulty swallowing or speaking
- Chest tightness
- Wheezing or coughing
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Dizziness or fainting
- Hives or redness over most of the body
- Muscle aches or cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weakness, fever or chills



Use with Caution

When using bug repellent, spray lightly on exposed skin, not on skin already covered by clothing, advises Dr. Calasanti. Reapply sunscreen every two hours, but only apply insect repellent once a day to avoid toxicity to the skin and body.

This information is provided courtesy of the pediatricians at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA. UCLA Health pediatricians are conveniently located in your neighborhood. In addition to our Children's Health Center in Westwood, we have offices in Brentwood, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica and West Los Angeles. All health and health-related information contained in this publication is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a healthcare professional.