STINGING INSECTS, SPIDERS AND SNAKES

STINGING INSECTS
Bites and stings happen. The stings and bites from most insects are more often a nuisance than a serious problem. A person’s response to a bite or sting depends on his or her sensitivity to the insect’s venom. Most people have only mild reactions.

LOCAL REACTIONS
A local reaction is a symptom(s) that is in the actual area of the sting. Symptoms may include swelling at the sting site, redness, warmth, pain or itching. While these reactions feel very unpleasant, they are not life threatening.

TO TREAT A LOCAL REACTION TO A STING:
- Remove the stinger (if present) by gently scraping across the sting with a broad, dull, firm and flat object like a credit card or stiff cardboard. Do not pinch the stinger or use tweezers, as this can squeeze more venom into the skin.
- Remove jewelry near the bite/sting site, as swelling may occur.
- Wash the area with soap and water to prevent infection.
- Apply an ice pack or cold compress to the sting site – 15 minutes on then 15 minutes off – for as long as needed to reduce swelling and pain.
- Apply hydrocortisone cream to the site of the sting to help decrease redness, swelling and itching.
- Apply a topical antibiotic ointment or cream to help prevent infection.

ALLERGIC REACTIONS
Some people are highly sensitive and allergic to the venom of bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets and ants. In addition to a local reaction, a person who is allergic may have the following symptoms:
- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of lips or throat
- Tightness in throat or chest
- Fast heart rate
- Hives
- Drop in blood pressure
- Dry, hacking cough
- Pale or flushed skin
- Swollen or itchy eyes
- Nausea, vomiting or stomach cramps

TREATMENT OF AN ALLERGIC REACTION: CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY!
If the person is unconscious and breathing, lay the person on his or her side to allow drainage from the mouth. Most people who are severely allergic to stings carry an EpiPen®. Check the person to see if they have such a pen and follow the instructions on the label.
TIPS TO PREVENT STINGS
- Wear light colored, long sleeved shirts and pants.
- Use insect repellents.
- Avoid using scented soaps, perfumes, lotions or hair sprays.
- Do not walk around bare footed.
- If you are known to have allergic reactions, keep an EpiPen® on hand and know how to use it.
- Pour sodas and other drinks into cups. Most stings in the mouth come from a wasp or bee that crawled inside a can. Drinking from a cup will allow you to see the bee. Don’t leave food containers open.
- Wear a hat and gloves while working among flowers and fruit trees.

POISONOUS SPIDERS
There are two species of poisonous spiders in Missouri. The black widow and the brown recluse. Despite the common belief that bites from poisonous spiders are often fatal, deaths from spider bites are extremely rare in humans.

BLACK WIDOW
The female black widow is jet black with a red hourglass shaped marking on the underside of her abdomen. Males are smaller, brown and not a big threat to people. Black widows live in undisturbed places such as woodpiles, dark corners of barns, garages and houses and under boards and rocks. The bite almost always becomes painful within 30 minutes to 2 hours. By 3 to 4 hours there may be muscle twitching near the bite which can lead to cramping, weakness and stiffness in the shoulders, back, chest or stomach. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, headache, anxiety and changes in blood pressure.

BROWN RECLUSE
This non-aggressive spider hides in undisturbed areas such as closets, corners, woodpiles and under sinks. Bites often occur when the victim puts on clothing in which a spider has been hiding. The color of this spider varies from light tan to brown with a violin-shaped marking on the back of the head chest area. Symptoms at the site of the bite may start with pain, redness, swelling, itching and burning. Usually within 1 to 3 days, the bite may look like red rings around a black blister and could take on a “bull’s eye” appearance. It may take up to 14 days to see the full effects of the bite. More serious symptoms, fever, rash, flu-like symptoms or darkened urine, are less common.
SPIDER CONTROL

Cleaning is the first step in spider control. Regular vacuuming, cleaning closets and storage spaces, reducing clutter and shaking out shoes and clothing before wearing help to reduce the chances of a bite. Prevent spiders from coming inside by caulking cracks and crevices on the outside of the house.

POISONOUS SNAKES

Most of the snakes found in Missouri are harmless, and actually very good for the environment (they keep the rodent population down), but there are five species which are poisonous. The copperhead is the most common poisonous snake followed by the cottonmouth, and three different rattlesnakes.

- These poisonous snakes are pit vipers, which means they have an opening on each side of the head called a sensory pit.
- Poisonous snakes have fangs, harmless snakes have small rows of teeth.
- Poisonous snakes have eyes with vertical pupils – like a cat – while all harmless snakes have round pupils.
- Poisonous snakes have a single row of scales on the underside of the tail; harmless snakes have two rows of scales.

TIPS TO AVOID SNAKE BITES

- Be aware in areas where snakes likely live: woodpiles, tall grassy areas, bluffs and rock ledges.
- Be cautious while hiking, especially around large rocks or logs. Wear protective shoes or boots. Consider using a walking stick when hiking.
- Do not place your hands under rocks or logs; tap the top of the logs before stepping over them.
- Wear rubber boots when fishing in streams that may harbor the venomous cottonmouth.
- Do not catch or pick up poisonous snakes.
- Contact the Missouri Department of Conservation for more information and facts about Missouri snakes.

FIRST AID FOR POISONOUS SNAKE BITES:

- Remain calm.
- Do not try to catch or kill the snake. Leave it alone. Consider using a walking stick when hiking.
- Note time of the bite and remove all tight clothing or jewelry which may delay or hide swelling.
- Call the poison center immediately at 1-800-222-1222 for instructions on all snake bites.
- Hold the limb or body part in a position slightly below or level with the heart.
- Wash the bite area with soap and water.
- DO NOT use ice.
- DO NOT apply a tourniquet.
- DO NOT cut over the fang marks and try to suck out the venom.
- Transport the person to the closest hospital.

Education is key to prevention. The Missouri Poison Center welcomes teachers, child care providers, scout leaders, EMS providers and other community educators to use these free resources to teach about poison safety.

BE POISON SMART! KEEP POISONOUS PRODUCTS OUT OF SIGHT & OUT OF REACH.

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