

## What are bites and stings?

Bites and stings can come from animals, spiders and insects. They are common, but rarely serious. Most happen in summer.

## What are the symptoms?

Most bites and stings cause only mild discomfort or pain, with itching, swelling and redness around the bite. The wound generally heals in a few days. Sometimes a blister or ulcer (break in the skin) may form. This takes longer to heal, especially if it becomes infected from scratching.

A bite or sting may lead to an allergic reaction. The most common allergic reactions are from bee and wasp stings. A reaction generally occurs straight away but it may take up to 24 hours. Symptoms range from an itchy rash (hives) to a reaction of the whole body, including swelling of the throat and tongue and life-threatening changes (*anaphylaxis*).

## Treatment

Not all bites require treatment. In some cases your doctor may advise:

- an *antihistamine* (such as *Phenergan* or *Telfast*) to relieve the itching
- a *tetanus* booster (injection)
- a *corticosteroid* medication (such as *prednisolone*) if you have a lot of swelling
- a self-injection kit of *adrenaline* (*EpiPen*) if you have a serious, life-threatening allergic reaction to a bite (*anaphylaxis*)
- antibiotics if there is an infection
- anti-venom for some poisonous snake, spider and marine animal bites.

## Home care

At home, the following can help ease most bites and stings:

- apply an ice pack (frozen peas in a tea towel or a sports icepack) or cool, wet face washer to the area
- apply calamine lotion or anaesthetic creams (speak to your doctor, health care professional or pharmacist)
- rest and raise the affected area (above the level of your heart)
- if you have pain, try taking a simple painkiller such as paracetamol (for example, *Panadol* and *Dymadon*). Check the label for directions
- do not scratch the affected area
- watch for any new problems, such as increased redness or swelling, or general illness (such as a fever). If these occur, see your local doctor.

## Seeking help



If you experience swelling around the lips, tongue or throat, or **breathing difficulties** after an insect bite, call an ambulance (dial 000).

If you are bitten by a snake use first aid treatment (immobilise the affected limb and apply a pressure bandage) and go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).



See your local doctor or health care professional if your bite does not clear up or you have any other concerns.



For health advice from a Registered Nurse you can call **NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day** on **1300 60 60 24** for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.\*

**NURSE-ON-CALL** provides access to **interpreting services** for callers not confident with English. Call **1300 60 60 24**.

\*Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate

## Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Contact the **Poisons Information Centre**  
Phone 13 11 26
- Visit the **Better Health Channel**  
[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

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If you would like to receive this publication in an **accessible format**, please phone 9096 0578 or email [edfactsheets@health.vic.gov.au](mailto:edfactsheets@health.vic.gov.au)



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