

# Bites and Stings

Australia has many animal and insect species that may bite or sting. In fact, 11 of the world's 12 most poisonous snakes live in Australia. Although relatively few bites and stings are seriously dangerous to humans, it may be difficult to distinguish which bites and stings are serious from those which are not. Basic first aid procedures should be applied in all circumstances followed promptly by appropriate medical treatment.

## Signs and Symptoms

Snake bites:

- Puncture marks
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- Headache
- Drowsiness or light headedness
- Change in vision (double vision, difficulty focussing)
- Chest or abdominal pain
- Difficulty breathing or inability to breath

Spider bites:

- Sharp pain at the site of the bite
- Sweating
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea

Funnel-web spider:

- Increased saliva in mouth
- Confusion
- Muscular twitching
- Breathing difficulties
- Unconsciousness

Red-back spider:

- Severe pain that is spreading
- Hairs on legs or arms may stand on end

## First Aid for Snake, Funnel-Web Spider, Mouse Spider, Blue-Ringed Octopus and Cone Shell Bites

- Check breathing and circulation
  - If patient is not conscious follow the DRABCD of first aid
  - Call 000
- Apply pressure immobilisation bandage:
  - Firmly bandage the area of body involved (including the wound) starting above the fingers or toes (but not so tight as to cause tingling or colour changes)
  - If a bandage is not available, something similar such as an item of clothing or towel can be used
  - Pressure immobilisation is recommended because it reduces the speed at which the venom spreads throughout the body by collapsing small vessels called lymphatic vessels, which are involved in collecting fluid (and the snake/spider venom) from the body's tissues and returning it to the bloodstream.
- Immobilise the limb using a splint to reduce the muscles from pumping the venom along the limb

- Encourage the person to sit quietly. Reassurance is important to help keep the patient calm
- If possible, mark the bandage at the site of the bite/sting with a pen so that medical professionals can examine the affected area without taking the bandage off
- Re-check circulation in the fingers or toes that have been bandaged to ensure the bandage is not too tight

Note, applying a tourniquet, cutting or sucking the venom from the wound is not recommended.

In the case of a snake bite, avoid washing the area, as residual venom can be used as a sample to help identify the type of snake involved. Do not attempt to kill the snake as snakes are protected by law. If it is possible and safe to do so, it may be useful to capture the animal involved, for identification purposes, in case anti-venom is required. However do not put yourself in danger.

An ambulance should be promptly called, by dialling 000. It is important to stay with the individual concerned in case they deteriorate and require CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) while waiting for medical help to arrive.

## First Aid for Redback Spider Bites

- Do not apply a pressure immobilisation bandage for Redback spider bites.
- Envenoming is not life threatening and resuscitation is rarely required.
- Reassure the patient.
- Apply an ice pack to bite site.
- Give simple analgesia - oral Paracetamol/Codeine may be sufficient.
- Consult Doctor - if patient not responding to simple analgesia, and/or symptoms other than at bite site eg. nausea/vomiting or the type of bite is in doubt.

## • First Aid for Tick Bites

- It is important to remove all ticks as soon as practicable after discovery.
- The tick should not be touched or disturbed as the tick will inject saliva into the skin and make the situation worse.
- Tick should be sprayed with an aerosol insect repellent preferably containing pyrethrin or a pyrethroid (if a repellent cannot be found which contains a pyrethroid, then Lyclear, a scabies cream containing permethrin will work fine). The tick should be sprayed again one minute later (or dabbed with the Lyclear) and left. After 24 hours it should drop off naturally or be gently removed with fine-tipped forceps.
- If above not possible remove the tick by gently grasping the tick as close to the skin as possible and gradually retract outwards in a straight line.
- When a tick is removed, commonly a portion of the head or the mouthparts are left behind. Generally this does not cause any problems as the head of the tick will fall out as the skin sloughs off in time. However, if a local reaction does occur, then a physician should be consulted.
- It is normal for a tick bite to remain slightly itchy for several weeks, however if other symptoms develop, then a doctor should be consulted immediately.
- Do not:
  - grasp the tick by the body because this may leave the head and mouth parts behind and cause more toxin to be injected into the person
  - apply methylated spirits or use a lighted match, cigarette or fingernail polish to remove the tick as these are likely to increase of tick saliva and foregut contents entering the wound, increasing the chance of disease transmission.

## First Aid for All Other Bites and Stings

- Wash the area with soap and water and apply an antiseptic, if available.
- Ensure that the patient's tetanus vaccination is up to date.
- Apply an ice pack to site for pain and swelling.
- Provide pain relief if required eg. paracetamol or an antihistamine (to reduce swelling, redness and itch).

- If bee, European wasp, ant or non-tropical minor jellyfish sting is suspected apply an ice pack for 15 minutes at a time to reduce local pain and swelling.
- In the case of a bee sting, remove the sting by sliding or scraping your fingernail across it, rather than pulling at it.
- If a bite occurs in a tropical region and Irukandji, jimble, sea anemone or box jellyfish sting is suspected, vinegar may be applied to inactivate the stinger (called a nematocyst).
  - Note: vinegar doesn't relieve pain from venom already injected
  - Note: Do not use vinegar on a suspected blue bottle sting
- Hot water may be an effective treatment for stingers caused by stonefish, bullrout, stingray, catfish, crown of thorns starfish or bluebottles. However, it is important to ensure the water is not so hot as to cause a burn.
- The patient should seek medical advice if they develop any other symptoms or signs of infection.

## Other Resources

[St John's Ambulance First Aid \[http://stjohn.org.au/\]](http://stjohn.org.au/)

[Children, Youth and Women's Health Service Website - Bites and Stings \[http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicsAlpha.aspx?p=121#b\]](http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicsAlpha.aspx?p=121#b)

## Help and Assistance

If you have any concerns with level of consciousness or breathing call 000 immediately.

If you have any other symptoms from or concerns about a bite or sting please contact one of our Registered Nurses at 13 HEALTH by phoning 13 43 25 84.