Snakes, Bees, Wasps and Spiders



SPIDERS

Of all the spiders that may cause medical problems, only the black widow and brown recluse are considered serious threats in the United States.

The black widow has a shiny black body, about the size of a pea. With legs extended, it’s about an inch long. Females have a red or yellow hourglass mark on their underside.

The black widow spider is partial to outdoor latrines and other places that attract flies. The black widow spider will attack with even the slightest provocation. Its bite is less painful than a pinprick and does not cause a hole in the skin, but soon, intense pain and stiffness set in. Symptoms also may include fever, nausea, abdominal pain, and chills.

For children and the elderly, black widow bites can be lethal.

Also, beware of the brown recluse spider. When it comes to insect bites, the bite of the brown recluse spider is one of the most feared. The yellowish tan to dark brown spider is a quarter to a half inch long. It has a characteristic fiddle-shaped mark on its upper body. Its bite can be painful, disfiguring, and have deadly results. Within hours of a bite, victims may suffer severe pain and stiffness, fever, weakness, vomiting or a rash.

The recluse’s venom destroys cells and clots blood, blocking blood vessels and leading to gangrene. Within 24 hours, the wound erupts into an open sore ranging from the size of a thumbnail to that of an adult’s hand. Anyone bitten by either spider should seek medical help immediately.

SNAKES

Snake seasons are spring, summer, and early fall. They like places that offer both a place to sun and a place to hide. If you’ll be working or walking in snake infested areas, wear protective clothing such as long pants, leather boots and gloves.

Most snakebites happen when a snake is accidentally stepped on, handled or harassed. Many people are bitten because they try to get a closer look or try to kill it. So, leave snakes alone! If you encounter a snake, stay calm and freeze in place. The snake will often move away. If it doesn’t move then you should slowly walk around it, keeping as far away as possible.

In California there are six poisonous species of snakes, all rattlesnakes. A bite from one of these snakes should always be considered a medical emergency. The symptoms of a poisonous snakebite vary depending on the snake’s size and species, the amount of poison in its venom, the bite’s location, and the victim’s age and underlying medical problems.

Specific treatment for snakebites should be left to the emergency medical personnel. Most medical professionals recommend against incisions in the wound, tourniquets, ice or any other type of cooling on the bite and against electric shock. However, if someone is bitten, the American Red Cross suggests a few basic first-aid steps:

- Keep the victim calm and still.
- Have the victim lie down, with the affected limb immobilized and placed lower than the heart.
- Remove rings, bracelets, boots, or other restricting items from the bitten extremity.
- Get medical care. Responding quickly is crucial.

BEES AND WASPS

If you are stung by a bee, remove the stinger gently (with tweezers, if possible) and avoid squeezing the poison sac.

Apply an ice pack or a cloth dipped in cold water to reduce swelling and itching.

A sting from a yellow jacket can be deadly. These insects feed on dead animals and can cause blood poisoning. If you have an allergic reaction to a bite, get medical help immediately.