



Unit 7 Bites and Stings

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Provide essential first aid in the event of various types of stings or bites
- ✓ Identify the potential signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction
- ✓ Differentiate between a superficial bite/sting and an urgent medical emergency

Unit 7

Bites and Stings

Bites are made by an animal jaw or mouth parts – e.g. a dog or spider. A venomous animal uses stinging apparatus combined with the injection of venom – e.g. jellyfish, bee or wasp.

Symptoms and signs – Not all may be present

- pain
- swelling of the bite or sting area
- discolouration of the affected area
- altered sensation – e.g. numbness or ‘pins and needles’
- nausea or vomiting
- headache
- blurred or double vision
- muscle weakness or paralysis
- breathing difficulty

Bites and stings that need special care

Spider, ant and centipede bites

Katipo or red-back spider bites spider may cause pain and illness to a baby or small child, but are not a threat to life in normal circumstances.



What to do

1. Apply Cold Treatment

- Wash the bitten area well to remove any remaining venom from the skin.
- Keep the patient still to reduce the toxic effects of the venom.

- Apply a wrapped ice pack for up to 10 minutes at a time, or a cold compress that has been soaked in water to which a few ice cubes have been added. An ice pack should be wrapped in a damp cloth to get the best effect from the ice and to avoid burning the skin. A cold compress should be changed whenever it becomes warm.

2. Raise a Bitten Limb

- If the bite is on a limb, raise it to limit swelling.
- If an arm or hand is involved, apply an elevation sling to provide comfort and support.

3. Seek Medical Advice

- Seek prompt medical advice if the patient is a baby or young child.

If the pain becomes severe or the patient becomes ill with a fever, headache, nausea or vomiting – call 999 for an ambulance.

Bee or Wasp Stings

Bees have only one stinging barb that is left in the skin following the incident. The venom sac is attached to the barb and continues to inject venom until it is empty. For this reason the barb should be removed as soon as possible (see below). How the barb is removed is not important.

Wasps do not leave a detached barb in the skin but inflict multiple stings, thus increasing the amount of venom injected. The danger with bee and wasp stings is that stings around the mouth, throat or face can swell and cause airway obstruction. Also, some people have an allergic reaction to bee venom and may collapse within 2 or 3 minutes after a sting, requiring resuscitation and urgent medical treatment.



How you can help

1. Remove the Barb

- If stung by a bee, immediately brush, pluck or scrape the barb off the skin to stop any more venom being injected. How the barb is removed is less important than removing the barb quickly.

2. Apply Cold Treatment

- Immediately apply a wrapped ice pack and leave it in place for up to 10 minutes. Reapply the ice pack at frequent intervals or whenever pain relief is needed.

3. Raise the Bitten Area

- Raise the bitten area as high as possible to limit the swelling that will occur.
- If an arm or hand has been stung, apply an elevation sling to provide comfort and support.

4. Seek Medical Advice

- Contact a local doctor for advice.

If the patient is known to be allergic to the venom – call 999 for an ambulance and assist the patient with any prescribed treatment.

Observe the patient closely for any change in condition. If any of the warning signs of an allergic reaction appear, send for an ambulance urgently.

The warning signs include:

- a fine rash over the trunk
- wheezing or coughing
- swelling around the face, eyes and neck

Cat or Dog Bite

Domestic animal bites usually cause an infected wound. Although the wound may be small, medical advice is recommended, and antibiotics are often prescribed and a protective tetanus injection given.

How you can help

1. Control any Bleeding

- If the wound is bleeding apply a firm pad.

Seek urgent Medical Advice and Treatment.

2. Clean a Minor Wound thoroughly

- Use warm soapy water or a saline solution to clean the wound.
- Apply a protective dressing and seek medical advice.

- ✓ *The Kids' Guide to First Aid: All About Bruises, Burns, Stings, Sprains & Other Ouches (Williamson Kids Can! Series) Paperback – January 30, 2000 by Karen Buhler*
- ✓ *All Stings Considered: First Aid and Medical Treatment of Hawaii's Marine Injuries (Latitude 20 Books) Paperback – Illustrated, June 1, 1997 by Craig Thomas MD, Susan Scott*