

Spider and Scorpion Bites

Black Widow Spider Bite

The black widow is a shiny, jet-black spider with long legs and a red or orange hourglass-shaped marking on its underside. It is about an inch long, including the legs. Black widow and brown recluse spiders are the only highly venomous spiders in North America. Black widow bites cause immediate local pain and swelling. Muscle cramps may also occur for 6 to 24 hours. They rarely cause death (except in younger children or when the victim is bitten by several spiders).

Call your child's health care provider IMMEDIATELY in all cases.

- **First aid** Put an ice cube on the bite to slow the spread of the venom. Then go to the nearest emergency room or wherever your health care provider tells you to go. Antivenin is available for severe bites in young children.
- **Prevention** Don't play or work in woodpiles, rock piles, or dark corners of outdoor buildings without wearing gloves. Spray insecticides in any area where black widow spiders are seen.

Brown Recluse Spider Bite

The brown recluse is brown, has long legs, and has a dark, violin-shaped marking on its head. It is about 1/2 inch long, including the legs. Brown recluse spider bites cause delayed local pain and blister formation in 4 to 8 hours. The skin damage may require grafting. The bites are rarely fatal.

Call your child's health care provider IMMEDIATELY in all cases.

- **First aid** Wash the bite thoroughly with soap and water. Bring the spider with you if possible. (Brown recluse spiders may be hard to identify.)
- **Prevention** Don't play or work in woodpiles, rock piles, or dark corners of outdoor buildings without wearing gloves.

Bite by a Nondangerous or Unidentified Spider

More than 50 spiders in the United States can cause local but nondangerous reactions (for example, golden garden spiders). The bites are painful and mildly swollen for 1 or 2 days, much like a bee sting. In fact, spiders are probably responsible for most single, unexplained, tender bites that occur on children during the night. (Mosquito bites are usually itchy rather than painful.) Many people are unduly concerned about the tarantula, a black hairy spider that is 2 to 3 inches long. Its mild venom also causes a local reaction resembling a bee sting.

- Although most spider bites are harmless, an occasional bite may have been made by a black widow spider. Try to capture the spider (dead or alive) in a jar and bring it along if your child needs to be seen by a health care provider. Don't bludgeon the spider beyond recognition.
- **Home care** Wash the bite thoroughly with soap and water. Then rub the area with a cotton ball soaked with a meat tenderizer solution for 15 minutes. If meat tenderizer is not available, an ice cube applied to the area often helps. Give acetaminophen or ibuprofen as needed for pain relief.

Call your child's health care provider:

IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child has abdominal pain or muscle cramps.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

During office hours if:

- The bite turns into a blister or purple spot.
- Your child develops a sore that doesn't heal.
- You have other questions or concerns.

Scorpion bite

Scorpions belong to the same class (arachnids) as spiders. They are found in desert areas. About 20 different kinds occur in the southwestern United States. Scorpions have poisonous stingers on their tails. Most of the bites cause symptoms similar to those of black widow spiders: local pain and swelling.

Call your child's health care provider IMMEDIATELY in all cases.

- **First aid** Put an ice cube on the bite to slow the spread of the venom. Then go to the nearest emergency room or wherever your health care provider tells you to go.
- **Prevention** If you are staying in an area where scorpions live, check your shoes and clothing before putting them on.

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