

Bug Bites

By Robert Arnold, M.D.

It's summertime. And the living is easy, especially for all the little biting, stinging, clawing, or irritating bugs that are such a nuisance this time of year.

Insect bites can be more than a nuisance. In fact, 60 percent of all the deaths from venomous animals in the United States are caused by insects; 40 percent by flying insects. Not only do they kill more people, they do it quicker. Whereas snakebite victims can live 6 to 48 hours before they receive proper treatment for the bite, the flying insect victims usually die within an hour. Of course, this means that campers and hikers in the wilderness are more vulnerable than their city cousins who can get to a hospital quickly. Fortunately, there's some good news. And some definite protection available.

Spiders

There are a lot of spiders. And it's a good thing for us that there are so many, because they eat insects. The million or so spiders on an acre of ground help keep the insect population to a minimum.

All spiders have fangs and venom, but most of them are considered harmless because their venom is weak or their fangs can't penetrate human skin. Only two spiders are found in the United States which are significant medical hazards—the black widow and the brown recluse.

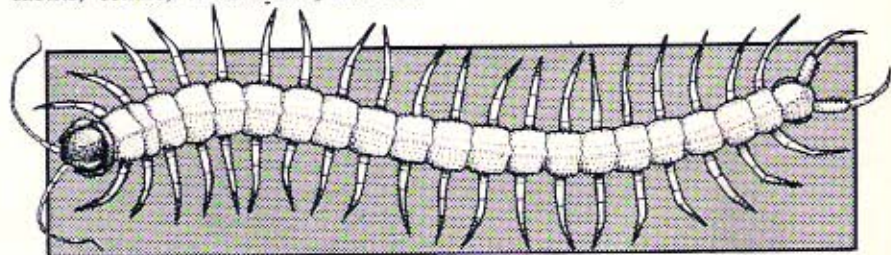
The notorious black widow spider is black with a red hourglass on the abdomen. This spider can be found in outhouses, barns, shelters, or under piles of trash and debris. Black widows won't attack humans, but will bite if they are squeezed.

A bite results in a small pinprick type of pain followed by a dull, numbing ache. Pain and muscle spasms in the chest and abdomen soon follow, which may resemble a heart attack or appendicitis. The victim also develops headache, nausea and vomiting, as

well as the bizarre "black widow face." This is characterized by red, swollen, droopy eyelids, a flushed face and spasm of the jaw muscles. Although this is a frightening picture, just wash the bite and keep the patient warm and calm. He should recover in a couple of days.

Fatalities are rare and limited to children, elderly people and multiple-bite victims. You should evacuate multiple-bite victims to a hospital for treatment.

The other poisonous spider found in the United States is the brown recluse. It is a small spider with a dark brown spot on its back shaped like a violin. These spiders like to stay out of the limelight. They may be found in cabins, cellars, warehouses, and un-

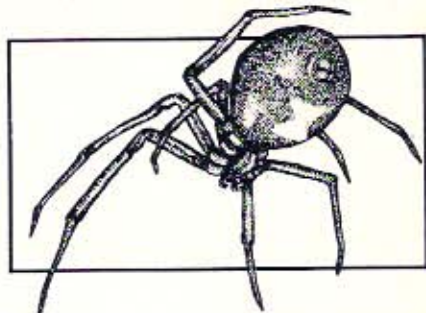


used clothes. Although they are usually considered a threat only in the south, they frequently infest furniture stored in warehouses. Because of this, the brown recluse is often shipped all over the United States.

Their bite is painless. Most people don't know they are bitten until the typical ulcer appears, which may become evident many hours to several days later. The venom causes tissue to become gangrenous and slough, resulting in a skin ulcer which heals slowly or gets larger until several square inches of skin are involved. These large areas must be surgically excised.

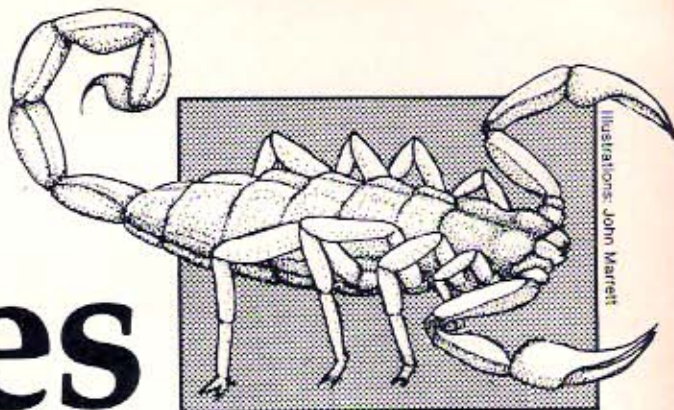
Sometimes these bites cause a systemic illness characterized by fever, hemolysis of blood (destruction of red cells), dark urine (Coca Cola colored) and a very sick patient. These systemic reactions can be fatal, so prompt medi-

Golden sculptured scorpion, only scorpion in the United States whose sting may be fatal. Distinctive features, yellow color with no stripes and relatively few hairs.



Black widow spider, deep black color with a red hourglass on the abdomen. Black widows won't attack humans, but will bite if they are squeezed.

Western house centipede, black or dark brown color and hard body segments with one pair of legs each. Sting is painful and causes swelling and sores.



Illustrations: John Marrett

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Bug Bites

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many insects, investigate the insect sting allergy kit. The life you save may be your own.

Ticks

Ticks and summertime seem to go together. So most people aren't alarmed when an occasional tick becomes attached to their skin. But they should be, because ticks transmit a variety of bacteria, viruses and spirochetes which may cause anything from tularemia to relapsing fever or blindness.

Pregnant ticks are responsible for one of the most bizarre diseases in medicine—tick paralysis. It is 100 times deadlier than the bite of a venomous snake. This disease resembles polio and is frequently misdiagnosed.

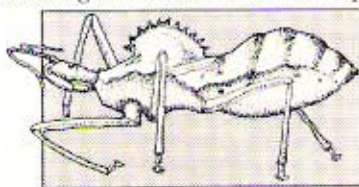
A recent issue of a medical journal reported the following case. A young girl complained of pain and weakness in her legs. She became so weak that she could neither stand, sit up, or even hold objects. Fortunately, someone noticed an engorged tick in her scalp and removed it. She improved dramatically and was completely well in three days. If the tick hadn't been removed, complete paralysis and fatality would have resulted.

Tick removal is a necessary and delicate operation. Some ticks burrow under the skin, and surgical removal may be necessary. Others may be removed by a gentle, steady pull. Here are some facts to keep in mind. Don't jerk the tick. If you do, you may pull the body off and leave the head imbedded in the skin. Don't use matches or cigarettes. The heat will cause the tick to disgorge and empty infected secretions into the host.

Scorpions

Scorpions are the world's most dangerous arthropod, especially in some areas of Mexico and the Middle East. There are about 650 species that range in size from three-quarters of an inch to a nine-inch giant.

Scorpions live in crevices and under debris, and venture forth at night to search for small insects. In the United States, pain is the only problem with all scorpions except one. This one is the golden sculptured, found in the southwest. It can cause coma and breathing difficulties. Artificial respira-



Assassin bug or wheel bug, the cog wheel crest on the thorax is its distinctive feature. Bite is painful and causes swelling and sores.

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tion may be necessary if the victim is to survive.

Common Insect Groups

Bees, wasps, hornets, and yellow-jackets are the winged stinging insects which are responsible for the most fatalities. All stings are painful, but some of them cause an allergic response known as anaphylactic shock. This occurs rapidly, usually within a few minutes. The small air passages in the lungs close and the patient suffocates. Any difficulty with breathing such as wheezing, gasping, coughing, or you just "can't get a deep breath" could be a tip to a possibly fatal reaction. Now is the time for your doctor-prescribed insect sting allergy kit, which contains an antihistamine and an epinephrine adrenalin-loaded hypodermic.

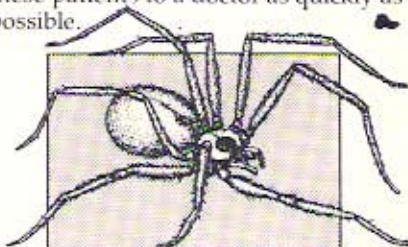
Doctors have known for a long time that adrenalin is a life-saving drug for anaphylactic shock. The problem was getting treatment soon enough. Formerly, it required a mad dash to the nearest doctor or hospital with a gasping patient for an adrenalin shot. Then someone came up with the idea of providing an adrenalin hypodermic for the patient's home use. This resulted in the insect sting allergy kit.

The kit is available in most drug stores. A doctor's prescription is necessary because adrenalin is not an over-the-counter drug. Your doctor should tell you how and when to use it.

First aid for these stings consists of examining the sting, washing it and removing imbedded stinger parts with scotch tape or tweezers. If pain is a problem, make a paste with water and meat tenderizer and apply it to the stings.

There are also several other groups of insects which do not cause fatalities, but are worth mentioning. Poisonous caterpillars such as the lo, puss and saddleback have poisonous hairs with barbs on them. These barbs will stick in the skin and cause red, swollen blisters, cramps, vomiting, and even a collapse. The imbedded hairs are best removed with scotch tape. Wear gloves when you do this.

The eyes are very vulnerable. Poisonous hairs can cause nodules and blindness if left in the eye too long. Get these patients to a doctor as quickly as possible.



Brown recluse spider, light-brown color with a dark brown spot on its back shaped like a violin. Bite is painless, but systemic reactions can be fatal.