Introduction

Stings and bites are common. Children are often bitten or stung because they tend to be less cautious than adults when exploring or investigating an interesting creature. This article will discuss the most common culprits of bites and stings: bees, wasps, mosquitoes and spiders.

Stings

Bees and wasps are often encountered in the garden and most children pick and smell flowers indiscriminately, without thinking of any danger. Children with a family history of bee allergy tend to be more aware of potential danger, but even then are not always looking for bees on the grass or hidden in jacaranda flowers.

Bee stings can produce differing reactions from mild discomfort to a severe allergic reaction:

- Minor reactions
  Uncomplicated, local reactions to stings include sharp burning pain at the sting site, a red welt at the site, slight swelling and a small, white spot where the stinger has punctured the skin.

- Large local reaction
  Stronger reactions with extreme redness, and increased swelling over a period of one to two days. This usually resolves over five to 10 days.

- Severe allergic reaction
  Also known as “anaphylaxis”, this is potentially life threatening. Signs of anaphylaxis include:
  - Flushed or pale skin
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Swelling of throat or tongue
  - Nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea
  - Dizziness or fainting
  - Loss of consciousness

Multiple bee stings result in an accumulation of venom and increase the risk of toxic reactions. Symptoms are similar to those of a severe allergic reaction. In most cases bees and wasps sting only if provoked. However, if a hive or swarm is disturbed, multiple stings may result.

When a person is stung a bee, the stinger should be removed as quickly as possible as venom may be released for several seconds. The sting should be flicked or scraped out to prevent compression of the venom sac. If a minute or more has elapsed since the sting, the stinger can be removed with no precautions as all the venom has already been released.

Bites

Insect bites often cause local reactions that are caused by irritant substances in the insect’s saliva (anticoagulants, agglutinins etc.). Most people experience an inflammatory reaction at the site of the punctured skin, which appears within minutes and consists of itchy local redness and swelling. Severe reactions to bites are rare, but they may progress to swelling in the throat, significant hives and wheezing. These symptoms require immediate medical attention.

Mosquitoes

The Anopheles, Culex and Aedes mosquitoes are usually responsible for human bites. Mosquitoes are often found...
near stagnant water as they require a watery environment to complete their life cycle. Mosquitoes may transmit diseases such as West Nile virus, malaria and dengue fever. Mosquito bites usually produce small, pale, itchy bumps on the skin. Young children may develop dramatic swelling surrounding the area of the bite. This may give the appearance of an infectious disease, especially when multiple bites occur. Antihistamines may alleviate the symptoms.

**Spiders**

While all spiders have some venom, not all is problematic to humans. Spiders do not bite unless provoked and then only in self-defence. Most spider bites can be treated by washing them well and applying an antiseptic ointment. Medical attention is required if the wound appears infected, does not heal or if symptoms such as cramps, headache, fever, chills or difficulty breathing develop.

**Conclusion**

Most bites and stings are not serious and resolve within a few days. Patients should seek medical advice if more severe symptoms appear. Children should be cautioned not to irritate or scratch any bumps as this may lead to infected sores.

**Bibliography**