

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

A.E. HAAS, M.D.

Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Wounds - Animal Bites

About a third of the hand wound infections we see result from a bite, mostly dog, cat and also human bites. These are among the worst infections. I tell patients not to suck on wounds when they get injured. People cut their finger then put it in their mouth and suck on it. The human mouth is the dirtiest place on earth. Your mouth is loaded with bacteria. Those with poor oral hygiene are even more dangerous.

Infections from human bites are usually from multiple types of bacteria. This is one reason the wound is so bad. Part of the problem is that the infections usually develop slowly. When they become painful it is usually because the tendon or joint is infected. They are not far below the skin level. Staph, strep and other organisms are frequently present. A bacteria called Eikenella is associated with some of the worst infections. If they get into the bone then you have bigger problems. Most amputations I have performed were the result of human bites.

Dog and cat bites cause infections by a Pasteurella bacteria. The good news is that it is usually treated with just an inexpensive penicillin medication. I just read that another cheaper drug called tetracycline is good for wounds caused from seal bites but I have not actually seen any of these. Seal bites probably do occur in Venice, not the one in Florida but rather the one in California. Marine animal stings or bites can cause infections from a Vibrio bacteria. Different antibiotics may be needed.

Initial treatment involves washing the wound with plain soap and water. Wrap the hand in a soft dressing or splint and elevate the wound and rest it. Even for the smallest puncture wound you should seek medical attention. A tetanus shot may be needed, antibiotics will be started and a wound culture may be done. People often want their wounds stitched up but this is not always done.

Wounds that have a high potential of infection or that may already be infected are frequently left open to drain. We want your body to be able to push out the bacteria. This is another reason why I rarely advocate the use of Ointments as Neosporin®. They may seal over the wound and prevent it from draining.

Animal bites result in some of the worst wounds especially in the hands. The amputation of infected parts is not uncommon. The smallest wounds deserve medical attention and the sooner the better. The treating doctor needs to know what caused the bite as treatments vary. Human, cat, shark and bird bites all require different drug treatments. Animal control authorities may need to be informed if there is a possibility of rabies infection.

**The above represents the opinion of A. E. Haas, M.D.
Venice Plastic Surgery, Venice Wound Center, Lakeside Medical Center**

Just call us directly. No referral needed unless required by your insurance company

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