

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

A.E. HAAS, M.D.

Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Insect bites

Allergic reactions to insect bites cause more deaths each year than bites from venomous snakes. The general body reaction is to get red and swollen in the bitten area. This allergic reaction may spread to the whole body. Rashes and swelling in the throat may cause blockage and death. If welts and generalized rash occurs, head for the doctor. The usual problem fortunately is just a small itching reaction.

The problems begin when we scratch the area. The bite then becomes infected. The bacteria is usually staph. This bacteria already lives on our bodies. They sit there doing no harm until the skin barrier is broken down by scratching. Then they invade the tissue and cause an infection. Probably 90 percent of skin infections are staph because these bacteria are very common.

The variety of usual over-the-counter medicines are acceptable for the small insect bite wounds. Speak to your local pharmacist for suggestions. When the area gets painful, more raised, tender, or red streaks develop its doctor time again. Infection usually develops over a period of several days. If the same symptoms occur within minutes or hours from the bite another problem is at hand. Infection takes time to set up but a venomous reaction is usually rapid. Black Widows are very common here. Just the other day I saw a big one under a piece of wood outside my house.

Sometimes a venomous reaction is slow to develop. The Brown Recluse spider is also in our area. When bitten there is the usual lesser reaction at the bite. Over a period of days or even a week or two the skin, sometimes several inches across, begins to die. It is often less painful than a Black Widow bite but becomes much larger and may require a skin graft to repair. Plastic surgeons are often involved in these cases.

The most common bite in the wound clinic is actually from ants, usually multiple bites. When I get bit (yes I have stood on ant hills too) I use Calamine lotion and take a Benadryl for the itching. Infection is unlikely if you do not scratch the area. When infection occurs you must see your doctor. Getting started on antibiotics early will minimize the infection, pain, itching and the possibility that something even worse develops.

**The above represents the opinion of A. E. Haas, M.D.
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Just call us directly. No referral needed unless required by your insurance company

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