

Insect Bites and Your Child

Mosquito and other insect bites are common in the warmer months of the year. The bites are annoying, but most of the time they aren't worrisome. Some people develop large local reactions to insect bites. They are warm, red, and swollen. The area can often be 4-5 inches wide. Children are more likely to have these large reactions because their immune systems are not yet mature. As they grow up, their reactions start to become less severe.

When should I WORRY about insect bites?

- Infection: Sometimes it can be hard to figure out if your child is having a large but normal reaction to an insect bite or if the bite is infected. Timing of symptoms is often helpful in sorting this out. Large but normal reactions usually start within a few hours. They stop getting worse 24-36 hours after the initial bite. They may remain large, red, and warm over the next few days, but should not get any worse. The redness and warmth of an infection usually worsens 2-3 days or more after the initial bite. Call your doctor if the following symptoms develop:
 - The bite looks worse 48 hours or more after it first appeared
 - Red streaks extending out from the bite
 - Pus draining from the bite
 - Temperature over 100.4°F
- Some insects can pass diseases from one person to another. Although this is rare, it is important to call your doctor if your child has any of the following:
 - Stiff neck
 - Temperature over 100.4°F
 - Severe muscle aches and weakness

- Vomiting or diarrhea
 - Severe headache
 - Looking or acting very sick
- In very rare cases, some people have sudden, life threatening reactions to insect bites. Call 911 if these symptoms suddenly develop:
 - Difficulty breathing and swallowing
 - Swelling, especially around the mouth, tongue, or eyes
 - Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea
 - Dizziness or fainting

Onset of symptoms in this type of reaction is typically within 20 minutes, and almost always within 2 hours of exposure.

How can I prevent insect bites?

Here are some action steps you can take to prevent insect bites:

- Wear lightweight clothing that covers arms and legs.
- Place mosquito nets over strollers or baby carriers.
- Do not use scented soaps or lotions, as they may attract insects.
- Avoid being outside at sunrise or sunset, when insects are most active.
- Repair broken screens on windows and doors at your home.
- Avoid places with standing water and drain any standing water around your home if possible.

When exposure to insects is unavoidable, there are several types of insect repellents you can apply to your skin and clothing to help prevent bites.

- DEET products: **These should not be reapplied more than once each day.** Higher concentrations of DEET provide longer protection, but you should always use the minimum amount you need and never more than 30% in children.
 - For 6 hours of protection, use 30% DEET

- For 2 hours of protection, use 10% DEET
- Picardin or oil of lemon eucalyptus products: These last 2-5 hours and can be reapplied.
- Permethrin products: These products are designed to be applied to clothing and other outdoor gear. They often remain effective through several washes of the clothing. They should never be applied to skin.

When applying insect repellents remember the following:

- Do not use any products on children younger than 2 months old. No products have been approved for children at this age.
- Do not use Oil of Lemon eucalyptus on children younger than 3 years old.
- Do not let children apply insect repellent without your help.
- To apply to the face, first spray some on your hands and then rub on the child's face. Avoid the mouth and eyes. Also avoid the hands of small children who may put hands in their mouths.
- Avoid areas that have rashes, sunburns, or cuts.
- DEET may decrease the effectiveness of sunscreen so you may have to reapply sunscreen more frequently. Do not use products that combine sunscreen and DEET since the sunscreen needs to be reapplied more often than it is safe to reapply DEET.

How can I treat insect bites?

Insect bites usually go away on their own within 7-10 days no matter what you do. To help with itching you can:

- Wrap an ice cube in a wet washcloth and place it on the bite for up to 20 minutes at a time.
- Apply 1% hydrocortisone cream to the bite up to 4 times per day for up to 10 days. You do not need a prescription to buy this.
- Mix baking soda with water to form a paste and apply the paste to the bite as needed.

- If your child's doctor says it is okay, you can give them oral medications like Benadryl® (diphenhydramine), Zyrtec® (cetirizine), or Claritin® (loratadine). Talk to your child's doctor about the correct dose.

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