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Centipede

This article describes the effects of a centipede bite.

This article is for information only. DO NOT use it to treat or manage an actual poisoning from a centipede bite. If you or someone you are with has an exposure, call the local emergency number (such as 911), or the local poison control center can be reached directly by calling the national toll-free Poison Help hotline (1-800-222-1222) from anywhere in the United States.

Poisonous Ingredient

Centipede venom contains several chemicals including histamine that make up the poison.

Where Found

This poison is found only in centipedes.

Symptoms

Symptoms of a centipede bite are:

- Pain in the area of the bite
- Swelling in the area of the bite
- Redness in the area of the bite
- Lymph node swelling (rare)
- Numbness in the area of the bite (rare)

People who are allergic to centipede venom may also have:

- Difficulty breathing
- Rapid heart rate
- Throat swelling

Some centipede bites can be very painful. However, they are not fatal and won't need treatment beyond managing the symptoms.

Home Care

Wash the exposed area with plenty of soap and water. DO NOT use alcohol to wash the area. Wash eyes with plenty of water if any venom gets in them.

Place ice (wrapped in a clean cloth) on the bite for 10 minutes and then off for 10 minutes. Repeat this process. If the person has problems with blood circulation, decrease the time to prevent possible damage to the skin. A trip to the emergency room may not be needed unless the person has an allergic reaction, but contact poison control just to be sure.

Before Calling Emergency

Have this information ready:

- Person's age, weight, and condition
- The type of centipede, if possible
- Time of the bite

Poison Control

Your local poison control center can be reached directly by calling the national toll-free Poison Help hotline (1-800-222-1222) from anywhere in the United States. This national hotline will let you talk to experts in poisoning. They will give you further instructions.

This is a free and confidential service. All local poison control centers in the United States use this national number. You should call if you have any questions about poisoning or poison prevention. It does NOT need to be an emergency. You can call for any reason, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

What to Expect at the Emergency Room

The health care provider will measure and monitor the person's vital signs, including temperature, pulse, breathing rate, and blood pressure. The wound will be treated as appropriate. If there is an allergic reaction, the person may receive:

- Blood and urine tests
- Breathing support, including oxygen (severe allergic reactions may require a tube down the throat and breathing machine, ventilator)
- ECG (electrocardiogram, or heart tracing)
- Intravenous fluids (IV, through a vein)
- Medicines to treat symptoms

Outlook (Prognosis)

Symptoms most often last for less than 48 hours. In some cases, swelling and tenderness can last as long as 3 weeks or it may go away and come back. Severe allergic reactions or bites from exotic types of centipedes may require more treatment, including a hospital stay.

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