

# FACTSHEET



This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: [www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form](http://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form).

## Bites and stings

In Australia there are many insects, spiders and snakes that bite and sting. This fact sheet provides information on the basic treatment of common bites and stings in Australia. For more information about how to manage bites and stings contact the **Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26**.

### General First Aid

Most bites and stings are not life threatening, but may cause mild pain, redness and/or itching. For most bites and stings the following first aid treatment will help ease discomfort.

- Wash the area with soap and water and keep it clean and dry.
- Apply ice (wrapped in a thin cotton cloth) or cool running water to reduce the swelling and relieve the pain.
- Seek advice from the Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26
- **If your child is having difficulty breathing, is unconscious or fitting, call an ambulance on 000.**

More detailed first aid advice is given below for bites and stings from:

- Snakes
- Spiders
- Ticks
- Scorpions, Centipedes and Millipedes
- Bees, Wasps & Ants
- Blue-ringed Octopus
- Bluebottles

### Snakes

There are many venomous snakes in Australia. Most bites do not result in death however all bites should be treated as potentially dangerous. Seek immediate medical assistance for all cases of suspected snake bites.

#### First Aid treatment:

- Apply a firm wide elasticised bandage around the bite (see picture below) and then apply a second bandage over the whole limb. Ensure that the bandage is not too tight and cutting off the circulation.
- Use a splint to keep the whole limb still (that is, immobilise the affected limb).
- Keep the person still and do not move them from their position.
- Call an ambulance (000) to take the person to the nearest hospital.
- Try to notice the colour and markings on the snake but DO NOT try to catch or handle it. DO NOT wash the bitten area as the venom on the skin may be used to identify the snake.
- If the person bitten collapses, perform CPR immediately and call 000 for an ambulance.



Wrap a crepe bandage over the bitten area.

## Spiders

There are many different types of spiders in Australia. Spider bites can cause pain, swelling and/or itching at the bite site.

The only venomous species of significance in Australia are the Red-back spider and the Funnel-web Spider (FWS). The FWS can be difficult to distinguish from other big black spiders.



### Red-back Spider

The red-back spider is found throughout Australia. The female red-back spider has a red/ orange stripe on its back while the male is very small, usually with no stripe. A red-back spider bite may result in pain, redness and sweating at the bite site

#### First Aid treatment:

- Wash the area with soap and water and apply an antiseptic if available.
- Apply ice or cool running water to relieve pain.
- Seek advice from the Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26 or your local doctor if pain continues. If severe pain occurs, the patient needs to be taken to the nearest hospital.



### Funnel-web Spiders and big black spiders

Many Australian spiders that are large and black can resemble the highly venomous funnel-web spider (FWS). A bite from this spider can be very dangerous, and potentially life threatening. A FWS bite will usually cause severe pain, lots of sweating, nausea and vomiting, drooling, difficulty in breathing, confusion, as well as

numbness, tingling and twitching of the mouth and tongue.

#### First Aid treatment for all big black spider bites:

- Apply a very firm wide elasticised bandage around the bite and then apply a second bandage over the whole limb. Ensure that the bandage is not too tight and cutting off the circulation.
- Use a splint to keep the whole limb still (that is, immobilise the affected limb) to slow the flow of venom around the body.
- Keep the person still.
- Call an ambulance (000) to take the person to the nearest hospital.

## Ticks

Common bush ticks or scrub ticks are often found on people. Ticks bury themselves in the skin and scalp. Some Australian ticks release venom into the blood. Symptoms may include headache, blurred vision, weak limbs and unsteady walking. These symptoms may start a few days after a tick bite.

Some people may be allergic to tick bites. Ticks should be killed before removal to reduce the chance of a life threatening allergic reaction and the development of mammalian meat allergy. Trying to remove the tick before it has been killed may cause the tick to inject more toxin, leading to a serious anaphylactic reaction.

#### First Aid treatment:

- Do not pull on the body of the tick or try to remove it with tweezers, as this will inject more toxin.
- To kill the tick safely, the Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCI) recommends either freezing adult ticks with an ether spray (eg: Wart off spray) or applying permethrin cream (Lyclear cream) to small ticks. Both products are available from the pharmacy. For people with a known tick allergy, this should be done in the hospital emergency department.
- Wait 10 minutes after treatment for the tick to die, then carefully brush off.
- Wash the area with soap and water and keep the area clean and dry.
- Seek advice from the Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26 if any symptoms occur.

## Scorpions, Centipedes and Millipedes

In Australia scorpions, centipedes and millipedes are not venomous. Pain, swelling and/ or itching may occur. Millipedes can cause blistering and brown discolouration of the skin.

### First Aid treatment:

- Apply ice or cool running water to relieve the pain.
- Seek advice from the Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26 or your local doctor if pain continues.

## Bees, Wasps & Ants

A bee, wasp or ant sting can cause pain and/or swelling. Some people may have an allergic reaction to the sting, which may cause a rash, vomiting, collapse or difficulty in breathing. Seek medical attention straight away if an allergic reaction occurs.

### First Aid treatment:

- Remove the sting by pulling it out or scraping it away; you may need tweezers, a credit card or something firm.
- Wash the area with water and keep the area clean and dry.
- Apply ice or cool running water to reduce the swelling and to relieve the pain (do not apply ice to the eye).
- Seek medical attention straight away if any allergic reaction occurs.
- If a person has been stung more than five times seek medical attention.

## Blue-ringed octopus



The blue-ringed octopus bite is very venomous. A bite may be painless but can cause paralysis, and the person may stop breathing.

### First Aid Treatment:

- Apply a very firm bandage around the bite and then apply a second bandage over the whole limb. Make sure that the bandage is not too tight and cutting off the circulation.
- Call 000 for an ambulance or take the patient to a hospital as quickly as possible.
- If the person stops breathing, they will need cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

## Bluebottles

Most stings are painful. Blue bottle stings leave a whip-like, red, wavy line on the skin from the tentacle. Allergic reactions are possible.

### First Aid treatment:

- Clear away the tentacles.
- Immerse or wash the sting area in hot water for 20 minutes, for pain relief. A hot shower up to 45°C may be used. First check that the water temperature is not too hot and BEWARE of burns.
- If hot water is not available or does not relieve pain, then apply ice or cool running water.
- Avoid using vinegar, it is not useful and may increase pain.
- Seek advice from the Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26 or your local doctor if pain continues.

## First aid courses

It is very important to know what to do in an emergency. First aid can save lives and prevent serious injuries. For information about first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) courses in your local area contact:

- Australian Red Cross Society  
Tel: (02) 9229 4111
- St John Ambulance  
Tel: (02) 9212 1088.

### CPR training for parents

Learn how to perform CPR on a child through a FREE online program at [cprtrainingforparents.org.au](http://cprtrainingforparents.org.au).

---

**Remember:**

- Keep a first aid kit at home and in the car.
- Save the Poisons Information Centre phone number in your mobile phone 13 11 26.
- More information at [www.poisonsinfo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.poisonsinfo.nsw.gov.au)