

Bug bites in children

Bug bites are skin reactions after the bite of many different types of bugs. Bites can be caused by insects (such as mosquitoes, flies, bees, and ants) or arachnids (such as spiders and ticks). They appear as pink, smooth bumps on the skin. Sometimes you may see a small scab at the center of the bite. Bites are more common in warmer months when bugs are more active.

While they are often itchy or painful, most bites are harmless and will go away on their own. In some parts of the world, bites from certain bugs can spread diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, and dengue. It is not usually possible to tell which bug caused a bite from looking at the skin or the bite mark. There are generally no other tests that can tell what type of bug caused a bite.

TIPS TO PREVENT BUG BITES

- » Wear protective clothing including long-sleeved shirts, long pants, socks, and closed toed shoes.
- » Take extra care if you are outdoors at dawn and dusk when bugs are often more active.
- » When outside, avoid sitting directly on the ground. Be sure to shake out and inspect any clothing that has been placed on the ground.
- » Use an insect repellent (bug spray). This should be applied before going outdoors.
- » Apply repellents only to exposed skin and/or clothing. Do not use under clothing. Follow the instructions on the bottle for the safe use of insect repellents. Reapply as directed.
- » If you are also wearing sunscreen, apply your sunscreen first. After the sunscreen dries, apply the insect repellent. Do not use a combined insect repellent and sunscreen.
- » EPA-registered repellent ingredients include DEET, picardin, Oil Lemon of Eucalyptus (OLE), para-menthane-diol (PMD), 2-undecanone, and IR3535. OLE and PMD are not recommended for use in children under 3.
- » Check your home, your bedding, and your pets for bugs. Call an exterminator if you find bugs in your home.

WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

Most bug bites heal quickly without medical treatment. Call your doctor if you notice:

- » Signs of infection, like spreading redness, yellow crusting, or pus
- » Redness or swelling that get worse over 24-72 hours
- » Increasing pain
- » Fever and chills
- » Signs of allergic reaction, like shortness of breath, facial swelling, or difficulty swallowing
- » Hives in areas other than the bite
- » Swollen glands (lymph nodes)

HOW TO TREAT BUG BITES

Fortunately, most bug bites and stings do not need treatment.

ITCH

In most cases the itch will get better quickly, within minutes, without treatment. For itch that lasts longer, consider applying an ice pack or cool compress to the area. A topical corticosteroid (such as hydrocortisone ointment) can also be used to help with itch. Allergy medicines, called antihistamines, are taken by mouth, and may be recommended by your doctor for severe itch.

SWELLING

An ice pack or cool compress can reduce swelling. Allergy medicine, taken by mouth, may also be recommended.

PAIN

Pain is more common after certain bug bites or stings, such as from ants and bees. Generally, this pain will subside within minutes. Over-the-counter pain medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) may be recommended. If your child has pain that continues or is worsening, speak with your doctor.

If other symptoms happen after a bug bite such as a fever, spreading rash, blisters, or body aches, seek medical attention.



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