

Itchy or Painful Insect Bites

Brief Version

What are insect bites?

Insect bites cause itchy, red bumps. Some bites are painful.

How can I take care of my child?

If the bite is itchy:

- Put calamine lotion or a mixture of baking soda and water on the bite.
- If it is very itchy, put on 1% hydrocortisone cream. You can get this cream at the drug store.
- Put firm, direct, steady pressure on the bite for 10 seconds. Use your fingernail or pen cap.

If the bite is painful:

- Rub the bite with a cotton ball soaked in meat tenderizer and water for 20 minutes. This will help the pain. Don't use meat tenderizer near the eye.
- If you don't have any meat tenderizer, use baking soda and water.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) to help the pain.

How can I protect my child from insect bites?

You can use insect repellent to prevent bites. There are 2 kinds of insect repellent. One kind is put on the skin. This includes DEET, picaridin, and oil of lemon eucalyptus. Another kind of insect repellent is put on clothes. This kind is called permethrin.

When using a product with DEET in it:

- Put some on skin before your child goes outdoors. You do not need to use more than a few drops. (Do not use DEET on children younger than 2 months old. Do not use oil of lemon eucalyptus on children under 3 years old.)
- Don't put any repellent on the hands or on a sunburn or rash.
- Wash repellent off after your child comes indoors.

You can also spray an insect repellent that contains permethrin on your child's clothes. Put it on the clothes before your child gets dressed. You can also spray this product on shoes, sleeping bags, or other items.

Call your child's doctor right away if:

- A bite looks infected. You may see red streaks. It may feel more tender.

Call your child's doctor during office hours if:

- The bite still itches or is very painful even after it has been treated.
- You have other questions or concerns.

Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.

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