

Self Care Briefing for Clinicians: Insect Bites and Stings

Summary

Most insect bites and stings are not serious and will get better within a few hours or days. Over-the-counter treatments can help ease symptoms, such as painkillers, creams for itching and antihistamines.

Recommendations for clinicians

- Provide the patient with a 'non-prescription' sheet or a patient information leaflet to promote education about self-limiting conditions suitable for self care when appropriate.
- Advise patients of safe and effective self care measures:
 - Remove the sting or tick if it is still in the skin.
 - Wash the affected area with soap and water and apply a cold compress to any swelling for at least 10 minutes.
 - Raise or elevate the affected area if possible to reduce swelling and avoid scratching the area.
 - Avoid traditional home remedies, such as vinegar and bicarbonate of soda, as they are unlikely to help.
- Advise patients to seek medical attention and consider treatment with a prescription in the following circumstances:
 - Symptoms do not start to improve within a few days or are getting worse.
 - The sting or bite is in the mouth or throat, or near eyes.
 - A large area (around 10cm or more) around the bite becomes red and swollen.
 - Symptoms of a wound infection, such as pus or increasing pain, swelling or redness.
 - Symptoms of a more widespread infection, such as a fever, swollen glands and other flu-like symptoms.
- **Urgent medical assessment** is required if any of the following are present:
 - Wheezing or difficulty breathing.
 - A swollen face, mouth or throat.
 - A fast heart rate.
 - Dizziness or feeling faint.
 - Difficulty swallowing.
 - Loss of consciousness.

Examples of over-the-counter products available to buy

Please advise patients that suggested prices are, a guide, correct at the time of writing and are subject to change.

- Paracetamol
 - Tablets: Not licensed for children under 6 years old (£0.90-£3.00 for 16 tablets).
 - Suspension: Not licensed for children under 2 months old (£2.50-£6.00 for 100ml).
- Ibuprofen
 - Tablets: Not licensed for children under 12 years old (£0.35-£4.00 for 16 tablets).
 - Suspension: Not licensed for children under 3 months old (£4.50 for 100ml).
- Chlorphenamine
 - Tablets: Not licensed for under 6 years (£3.00-£4.00 for 30 tablets).
 - Syrup: Not licensed for children under 1 year old (£5.00 for 150ml).
- Cetirizine
 - Tablets: Not suitable for children under 6 years old (£0.99-£5.50 for 14 tablets).
 - Solution: Not suitable for children under 2 years old (£5.00 for 100mls).
- Hydrocortisone 1% cream: Not licensed for children under 10 years old (£1.50 for 15g).

References/resources

- [Selfcare forum](#)
- [NHS.uk](#)
- [Patient UK](#)

Document History

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