**Bites and Stings: Do you know what to do?**

The first thing that often comes to mind when we think of bites and stings from animals and insects is the discomfort that these incidents cause. However, it is important to realize that pain is not the only consequence that may arise.

Animal and insect bites can also lead to serious medical situations, especially in foreign countries that may not have the same standard of care. While the injury itself may not seriously harm you, even relatively mild bites and scratches can transmit infection and disease like rabies, tetanus or malaria.

“International SOS regularly sees cases of animal and insect bites from travelers,” says Robert Quigley, MD, Regional Medical Director, Americas, for International SOS. “That cat, puppy, or monkey may look cute, but it’s best to keep your distance.”

Here are some potential threats common in traveling experiences:

**Animal bites**

Rabies is a term that is thrown around in the topic of animal bites, but many travelers do not understand the potential life-threatening cost. Rabies is the most severe disease transmitted by animal bites and the outcome is always fatal unless treated. While dog and cat bites are a common means of rabies infection, other animals – like bats and monkeys - can carry and spread the disease.

Keep in mind that most animals are wary of humans and try to avoid contact with us. Most animal-related injuries are the direct result of an attempt to pet, handle, and feed or harass them.

If you are bitten or scratched by an animal, follow these treatments steps:

* Immediately clean the wound with soap and water. Also cleanse with a providone-iodine solution, if available.
* Seek medical advice immediately and call International SOS to assess the need for a rabies and/or tetanus vaccination, even if you were vaccinated before traveling*.*

**Mosquito, tick and other insect bites**

Small crawlers tend to give us the creeps; this reaction is justified because many diseases are transmitted through mosquito, tick or other insect bites. These diseases are often different abroad than those at home, with malaria present in many warmer parts of the world.Some of these diseases can be avoided by having a vaccination or taking preventative medication, but others cannot. Additionally, vaccines and medication do not provide 100-percent protection.

To stay healthy, it is important to avoid insect bites. That includes using an effective bug spray as well as dressing in long pants, sleeves, hat and closed toe shoes. Sleeping in air conditioning and using mosquito nets are also effective preventative measures.

Ticks live in wooded areas as well as shrubs and grasses. Mosquitoes breed in stagnant water, such as in swamps and in sitting water containers in residential areas or even old tires. Different types of mosquitoes bite at different times of the day, so protection and awareness is crucial at all times. For example, those that spread malaria, bite at night (from “dusk until dawn”), and mosquitoes that spread dengue fever bite during the day. When returning indoors, check all clothing and your body for ticks and if found, remove promptly.

**Snakes, scorpions and spiders**

The most dangerous species of venomous animals encountered in tropical, subtropical and desert areas are snakes, scorpions and spiders. They are generally most active at night.

Poison from snake and spider bites and scorpion stings causes tissue damage around the bite area. Venom can also have various serious effects throughout the body, so immediate care is essential. Some reactions include nerve damage, hemorrhages, and blindness if the venom comes in contact with the eyes.

Being bitten by a venomous snake, scorpion or spider is a medical emergency. It requires *immediate* attention in a medical facility. Many treatment methods made popular through movies and books should not be used as first-aid measures (i.e. incisions, suction, tourniquets and compression). Do not attempt to handle any of these animals.

“Antivenom treatment should be administered only in a medical facility,” says Dr. Quigley. “The general first-aid treatment includes immobilizing the entire affected limb with splints and placing a firm (but not tight) bandage around the whole limb. This will limit the toxin’s spread through the body as well as the amount of local tissue damage.”

**Aquatic Animals**

Although unexpected, venomous animals also exist in aquatic environments. Jellyfish stings can vary in degree and trauma. While most stings simply cause an itchy rash, some stings can become much more severe. The stings of some tropical jellyfish can be fatal if not treated promptly.

The spines of sea urchins and starfish embedded in human skin can cause infection and are difficult to remove. Stings from some poisonous fish such as lion fish, scorpion fish or stone fish can be life threatening. Ask local authorities to advise you of any dangerous aquatic organisms before choosing a place to swim or dive.

[International SOS](http://internationalsos.com/en/) physicians and nurses are always available to answer your questions. No issue is too small, and it’s best to seek advice as soon as possible when trouble strikes.

More information and tips are available at [www.internationalsos.com](http://www.internationalsos.com). Simply insert our membership number (XXXXXXXX) or visit our Intranet site at (insert link).

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