Critter Encounters – Bites and Stings

While working in your garden, you feel a sharp sting on your hand. On a camping trip, your child says she was bitten by a funny-looking bug. When pruning a tree, you disturb a beehive, resulting in angry bees and several stings. What do these scenes have in common? They are all close encounters of the critter kind!

At certain times of year, in every part of the country, there is a good chance people will cross paths with some of the creepy critters that fly, crawl, slither or swim. Although most encounters will be harmless, bites and stings inevitably will occur. When that happens, remember that expert medical professionals at the Texas Poison Center Network are standing by, ready to help.

When you call the Texas Poison Center Network at **1-800-222-1222**, you will receive first-aid advice and, if necessary, referrals to your doctor or emergency department. Even when someone does not know the actual identity of the offending pest, the first-aid steps provided by a poison center specialist may allow treatment at home. At other times, the bite or sting will require urgent medical care, and the poison center will help with that, too.

Poisonous critters can be found everywhere, from people's homes or backyards to remote back country sites. Some people may encounter stinging fire ants; others may find themselves face-to-face with a rattlesnake or coral snake. For some, a hornet sting could produce a serious allergic reaction, and for others, a spider bite will leave the unlucky person with a dangerous wound.

Jellyfish, fire coral, or poisonous fish should be avoided at all costs. Since they may carry rabies, even bats can be considered toxic.

For a child or an elderly person, any bite or sting may cause a much more serious reaction than in a healthy adult and should be checked out. Even when there are only very local symptoms – such as a bite from a non-venomous snake, most scorpions or an insect – you may need to take steps to prevent infection. If a tick decides to latch on for a ride, there are ways to ensure timely removal before it can cause problems.

What can I do to prevent an encounter with a poisonous critter?

- Always check footwear and clothing before putting them on, especially when they are stored outdoors.
- When camping, shake out the tent and sleeping bag before climbing in to be sure you will not have unexpected company overnight.
- In some areas, critters will take refuge in garages or even under vehicles, so always be aware that you may stumble upon one.
- When collecting firewood or rocks for souvenirs, watch where your hands are headed.
- Be careful not to aggravate bees when walking through a field of flowers or working in the backyard.

- Keep sweet drinks and food covered so they don't attract stinging insects.
- Consider repellents when heading to chigger, black fly or tick country.
- When bitten or stung, we may be tempted to try folk remedies recommended by others or found online; however, doing so may do more harm than good. Instead, call **1-800-222-1222** and consult with the poison experts as soon as possible.
- If heading to a remote area with no phone service, follow the scouting motto and "be prepared": before you go, research possible encounters and the treatment steps that might be needed in case you have a close encounter of the critter kind!

What are the first aid procedures for a bite or sting?

INSECT BITES:

- Remove stinger when possible.
- Call the Poison Center **1-800-222-1222**. If patient develops breathing problems, or rash, call 911.

VENOMOUS SNAKE BITES:

- Remove any jewelry.
- Keep the victim calm.
- Do not cut and try to extract the venom.
- Do not use ice or a tourniquet.
- Do not try to capture the snake.
- Call the Poison Center at **1-800-222-1222** for instructions then go to the nearest hospital.

The Texas Poison Center Network serves the State of Texas to prevent poisoning. TPCN offers free and confidential services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you believe you have been exposed to a poison or have questions about a substance that may be poisonous, call **1-800-222-1222** immediately.