

## Infestations



# Insect Bites

## Important Points

- Most insect bites occur on the exposed areas such as the face or the arms
- Occasionally groups of insect bites can occur on the body where an insect has crawled under clothing
- Heat makes the itch worse
- Cooling down the area with a cold, wet face washer may help
- Antihistamine creams may help, but watch out for allergy
- Antihistamine syrup may be helpful at night
- If the skin is broken with scratching, use antiseptics to prevent infection

## What are they?

Insect bites are a local skin response to toxins (poisons) which are injected into the skin by a variety of different insects. They are very common and some children are more sensitive than others. Insects produce one or more small bites that remain as itchy spots in the skin for several days. They sometimes develop a blister, particularly on the legs.

## Where do they occur?

Most insect bites occur on the exposed areas where insects are able to get to the skin. Groups of insect bites can sometimes occur on the body where an insect has crawled under clothing.

Occasionally a child can develop an allergic reaction to insect bites. They then develop crops of spots which look like insect bites well away from the original site where the child was bitten. For example, an insect bite on the leg may lead to spots occurring on the body and the upper limbs. These tend to settle over time, but may flare up again if the same insect bites the child.

## How are they treated?

The main feature of insect bites is the itch. This will be worse with heat. Cooling down the area with a cold wet face washer may help. Some children benefit from calamine lotion or other cooling products applied to the skin.

Antihistamine creams are occasionally used, but they can cause an allergic dermatitis. If a rash starts to occur where the cream is placed on the skin, it should be stopped immediately. Occasionally the use of antihistamine syrups recommended by the family doctor may be of value if the itch is severe and waking the child at night.

There is a risk of bacterial infection in an insect bite if excessive scratching has led to weeping and crusting in the area. Antiseptics may be necessary to prevent infection in that case.

Most insect bites settle within several days. If the itchy spot continues, or many more spots are occurring, it may be necessary to seek further advice from a doctor to make sure that these spots are not being caused by something other than the insect bites.

### **Further Information**

Your Maternal and Child Health nurse.

Your pharmacist.

Your family doctor.

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