

## Venomous Spiders

The female black widow spider has a round, glossy, black body about one-half inch long, with an orange-red hourglass shaped marking on the underside. It is commonly found throughout our state. Bites by this spider typically are painful and result in initial redness and swelling in the region of the bite. Symptoms may progress to muscle cramps and muscle rigidity, headache, nausea, vomiting, weakness, twitching, and difficulty breathing. The peak effect usually occurs in four to six hours. Medical treatment is definitely indicated, since fatalities, although rare, have occurred.

The brown recluse spider can be identified by its long spindly legs and small, light-colored, oval shaped body, marked on top with a darker violin shape. Symptoms from the bite of this spider are usually limited to a local tissue reaction. At first there may be very little evidence of a bite and very little pain. Usually, within eight to 16 hours, a fluid-filled vesicle will develop in the middle of the bite. This blister is often encircled by a red swollen area, and this in turn is surrounded by a blanched pale ring. This "target lesion" is typical of brown recluse bites. Over the next one to two days, the blister will rupture, leaving an open ulcer. Unless medical treatment is obtained, this lesion may become infected and spread. In serious cases, there may be significant tissue loss and more severe complications, including breakdown of red blood cells with resultant kidney damage.

If a black widow or brown recluse bite is suspected, contact the Mississippi Regional Poison Control Center immediately.



## First Aid for Spider Bites

Calm and reassure victim.  
Remove rings, bracelets, watches, gloves or shoes that may restrict circulation as the area begins to swell.  
If the bite is on an extremity, immobilize the affected area.  
Gently cleanse the bite.  
Place a topical antibiotic ointment on the area and cover with a Band-Aid.  
Caution the patient to avoid rubbing, massaging, or scratching the bite area.  
Place a cool compress over the area to help reduce swelling. Be careful not to leave this on the bite.  
Call the Mississippi Regional Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222

## Catfish Envenomation

Punctures by the spine of a catfish fin deposit a venom which results in an immediate onset of symptoms. Symptoms may include intense throbbing or scalding pain spreading upward from the wound, and lasting 30-60 minutes. The area quickly swells and muscle spasms usually follow. Victims may experience episodes of fainting, decreased heart rate and slowed breathing. The wound may become infected. Immediately begin cleaning the wound, removing any excess tissue. Immerse wound immediately in hot (not scalding) water for 30 to 90 minutes. Make sure tetanus is current (within past 5 years). Apply antibiotic ointments/creams and monitor closely for infection. Keep wound elevated. The patient is to stay off the extremity until the swelling goes down.

## Venomous Animals of Mississippi

**FOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE  
WITH BITES OR STINGS  
CALL 1-800-222-1222**

# Venomous Animals of Mississippi



**Mississippi Regional  
Poison Control Center**

**1-800-222-1222**

## VENOMOUS ANIMALS OF MISSISSIPPI

There are nine species of venomous snakes in Mississippi. They are as follows:

- Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake
- Canebrake Rattlesnake
- Carolina Pigmy Rattlesnake
- Dusky Pigmy Rattlesnake
- Western Pigmy Rattlesnake
- Eastern Cottonmouth Moccasin
- Western Cottonmouth Moccasin
- Southern Copperhead
- Eastern Coral Snake

In addition, the following two species of venomous spiders are known to exist in our state:

- Black Widow Spider
- Brown Recluse Spider

Other species in this area which are known to be of potential danger include:

- Bees, Wasps, and Hornets
- Fire Ants
- Stinging Caterpillars
- Catfish
- Portuguese Man-of-War

Bites and stings by these groups usually cause local pain, swelling and redness. However, the victim of any insect sting can develop an allergic reaction which may be manifested by a rash, nausea, vomiting, headache, shortness of breath, and possibly unconsciousness and shock. This type of reaction is a life-threatening emergency and medical assistance must be sought immediately.

### FACTS ABOUT SNAKES AND SNAKEBITES

Of approximately 7,000 snakebites each year in the United States, there are fewer than 15 deaths. Most snakes are normally not aggressive and, given the chance, will avoid contact with man. All venomous snakes in Mississippi have the ability to bite but do not always release venom. About 35-40 percent of the bites reported each year result in little or no envenomation.

Most cases of snakebite that result in envenomation are related to the victim's attempting to kill or catch the snake.

Signs and symptoms of envenomation may include any or all of the following:

- Fang Marks
- Intense Local Pain
- Rapid Swelling
- Discoloration
- Oozing of Blood from the Fang Marks

If fang marks are present but there is little or no pain, swelling, or discoloration and the bite is dry, envenomation is probably minimal.

Many snakebite victims are discharged from the hospital within 24 hours and recover with no long-term effects. Despite this fact, you should always seek medical evaluation of a snakebite injury.

### First Aid for Snakebites

If victim is not arousable or is not breathing call for an ambulance. For assistance call MRPCC at 1-800-222-1222.

1. Calm and reassure the victim.
2. If the snake is still in the area do not attempt to kill or catch it unless it poses an immediate danger to you or the victim. Try to remember what the snake looks like so that you can identify it from pictures in the emergency department.
3. Remove all items that may restrict circulation in the affected extremity. Watches, bracelets, rings, gloves or shoes may pose a problem as the area swells.
4. Immobilize the affected area as much as possible. Attempt to keep the bite at or slightly below the level of the heart.
5. Wash area thoroughly but do not rub or scrub as this may promote absorption of the venom.
6. Attempt to keep the victim from moving rapidly about while evacuating to transportation.
7. Take victim to the nearest medical facility as quickly as possible.

Do not give the victim anything to eat or drink, particularly alcohol.

Do not place the affected area in ice.

Do not make any cuts or apply suction to the area.

Do not attempt to give antivenin.

Do not administer pain or anti-anxiety medications.

Do not apply a tourniquet.

Illustration courtesy of Mississippi State Cooperative Extension Service informational sheet 641

