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Ask-a-Provider: Tabitha Thrasher on bug bites

Ask-a-Provider is an occasional feature that highlights timely questions-and-answers with Asante health care providers.



Tabitha Thrasher, DO, joined Asante Physician Partners in Grants Pass last year as a family medicine physician. [Dr. Thrasher](#) earned her doctor of osteopathy degree from Rocky Vista University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Parker, Colorado. She completed her family medicine residency at the University of Wyoming in Casper, specializing in geriatrics. She also has special interests in preventive care and sports medicine.

Dr. Thrasher enjoys spending time with her family in the outdoors, hiking and rafting.

Q: How can I prevent bug bites, and what should I do if I get one?

A: Bug bites can be a hazard of outdoor fun, but you can ward them off with proper protection. First, if you're hiking in wooded or tall grassy areas, wear long pants, socks and shoes that cover your entire foot. Try wearing wide-brim hats with bug veils to keep the pests off your face and neck when gardening. And whenever you play or work outdoors, use bug repellent. Options today include everything from chemical sprays to all-natural lotions. Choose whatever formula works best for you.

Q: What is the best way to relieve symptoms from bites?

A: If you do get bit, treat the bite as quickly as possible in order to relieve the pain or itch and to keep it from getting worse. For mosquito or spider bites, calamine lotion or a gentle over-the-counter anti-itch cream works well. If the spot becomes infected or you develop flu-like symptoms, see a doctor as soon as possible. Some mosquitoes carry diseases such as West Nile virus.

Q: What about bee stings?

A: Bee or wasp stings are painful at first, but they don't usually produce any lasting effects in people who aren't allergic. Remove the stinger immediately by scraping it with the side of a credit card or other flat object. Never squeeze it with tweezers or you might release more venom into the skin. Wash the affected area with soap and water and apply an over-the-counter antibiotic ointment. You can ice the spot or take a mild pain reliever such as Tylenol if needed. Antihistamines such as Benadryl can also help if you experience mild swelling or pain.

Q: Are ticks a problem in this area?

A: These tiny critters are common in wooded or tall grassy areas. Wood ticks are generally harmless, but deer ticks can carry diseases. If a tick latches onto your skin, gently remove it with tweezers as soon as you find it. Make sure you remove not only the body but also the head, which buries into your skin. Save the tick in a sealed plastic bag in case you need a doctor to test it later. Wash the affected area and then watch closely for signs of infection. A bulls-eye shaped red spot or rash surrounding the tick bite is a sign of Lyme disease, so see a doctor right away.

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Q: Are doctor's visits really necessary for a bug bite or sting?

A: Anytime a bite or sting becomes excessively swollen, red, painful or filled with pus, or if you develop fever or flu-like symptoms, get checked by a doctor. Watch carefully for allergic reactions, especially in children who have not been bitten or stung before. If you or your child develop a rash, swollen face or body parts, or have difficulty breathing following a bug attack, seek medical help immediately.

Tabitha Thrasher, DO, is a family medicine physician with Asante Physician Partners-Family Medicine in Grants Pass. To schedule an appointment, call her office at (541) 507-2080.

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