POISON OAK, BEE STINGS AND SNAKE BITES

Poisonous Plants

Poison Oak is found along the Pacific Coast of North America including Washington, Oregon and California, and along the Atlantic Coast. Poison oak can grow as a dense shrub in open sunlight or a climbing vine in shaded areas. The three leaflets have scalloped edges resembling the leaves of a true oak and can be bronze, bright green, yellow-green or reddish depending on the season. The plant can produce greenish-white or tan berries.

Contact with this plant causes rashes, redness, blisters and itching. If the symptoms of an exposure to poison oak are not properly cared for you may end up with a fever or an infection.

First Aid for Poison Oak

First of all, do not scratch. This will only irritate your skin more and it could lead to infection. As soon as you can after you are exposed, wash the area with soap and warm water. After that, pat on rubbing alcohol, then calamine lotion or another lotion that reduces itching.

If your eyes have been affected or if your reaction is severe, contact a doctor immediately.

Bee Stings

Bee stings are painful and sometimes very dangerous. While the sting of the Africanized bees now found in the Los Angeles area, are no more toxic than their European cousins, they are more aggressive. Keep an eye out for swarms of bees. Some people are allergic to bee stings and their reactions can be severe and fatal.

First Aid for Bee Stings

If you are stung by a bee, remove the stinger then wash the wound with soap and warm water. There are some lotions such as Sting Eeze, which alleviate pain. Watch for a reaction that could lead to serious delayed problems. If you experience any type of reaction seek immediate medical assistance.
**Snake Bites**

A snake bite is a wound caused by a snake’s fangs that puncture the skin. Most snake bites that occur in the United States are not poisonous and death from a poisonous snakebite is extremely rare in this country because of our advanced healthcare system. While there are many poisonous snakes throughout the world, only a limited number of them live in the United States. The Rattlesnake is the only native California species of snake that is poisonous. It has a stout body that ends with the blunt rattle that it is known for. Their eyes have vertical pupils and they have broad triangular heads.

The Pacific Rattlesnake is the most common rattlesnake of the Coastal Ranges of California. It is very similar to Diamondbacks and Red Diamonds, but it is dark-colored, sometimes almost black, whereas Diamondbacks are brownish, and Red Diamonds are reddish. Also, the diamond-shaped patches on the top part of the snake tend to be less distinct than on their cousins. The Pacific tends to be smaller than the others, generally no more than 4 feet long. The Red Diamond is a shy rattlesnake that tends to slither away, rather than stay and coiled up. It is also smaller, but it can still get up to 5 feet long. It is a mild-mannered rattlesnake that likes the woodlands and brushy slopes of the Southern California Coast, as well as inland areas of the Los Angeles and San Diego basins. When you see a big rattlesnake, it is more likely to be a Pacific or Diamondback Rattlesnake. They are active both day and night, becoming nocturnal when the weather is hot.

To reduce your risk of being bitten by a snake when outdoors in wooded or grassy areas, especially areas that are known snake regions, wear long pants and boots and always use a stick to move large rocks or branches instead of using your hands. Do not step or put your hands where you cannot see them and avoid wandering around in the dark.

**First-Aid for snake bites**

The list below provides some basic first aid guidelines for bites from all poisonous snakes in the United States, including rattlesnakes, copperheads and water moccasins:

1. Calm and reassure the victim, treat for shock, keep them at rest with the bitten area immobilized and placed lower than the heart.
2. Remove rings, watches and anything else that might impair circulation if swelling occurs. Wash the wound and monitor swelling.
3. Transport the victim to a doctor as soon as possible by carrying them, or if the victim is stable, by walking very slowly.
4. **DO NOT** cut the wound and **DO NOT** try to suck the venom out by mouth. Mechanical suction for 30 minutes with a reverse syringe helps if you begin suction within five minutes after the bite occurs.
5. **DO NOT** give painkillers, such as aspirin, Tylenol or Advil.
6. **DO NOT** apply ice or immerse the wound in cold water.
7. **DO NOT** apply a tourniquet.
8. **DO NOT** give alcohol to the victim to drink.
9. **DO NOT** electrically shock the victim.

While a non-poisonous snake bite is healing, it should be watched for signs of infection, including swelling, redness, pus or a red streak from the bite area. If you experience any of these symptoms, call your doctor for advice.

If you have any questions or concerns contact City Safety Engineer, Allan Tan at 213-473-6981.