

Bites and parasites: Schistosomiasis, Rabies, Snakes, Scorpions, Spiders and Worms

Do you have a taste for food in exotic countries?
Try to make sure that only *you* bite foreign beasts, not vice versa.

Schistosomiasis

Schistosomiasis is present in freshwater lakes and rivers in many areas of Africa and the Middle East and some parts of South America and the Far East. The parasite penetrates the skin. This may cause an itchy rash. A few weeks later it may cause a fever, generalised aches and often an itchy rash. The patient may develop bloody diarrhoea or blood in the urine or many other long term problems.

Avoid swimming or paddling in lakes and rivers in most parts of Africa, Madagascar, Turkey, Iraq, Brazil, Surinam, Venezuela, the Caribbean, many Indian Ocean islands, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Laos and Cambodia.

Rabies

Rabies is a fatal infection transmitted by bites, licks or scratches.

Do not stroke cats and dogs. Avoid contact with wild animals. If you are bitten by an animal wash the wound thoroughly then put alcohol or iodine on the wound. Then go immediately to a (city) hospital where rabies vaccines (and immunoglobulin) are available. If you have had a course of Rabies vaccines this buys you a little time.

Snake bites

Almost all snakes will not bite humans unless provoked. Serious poisoning and death is rare. Wear boots and use a torch at night to avoid stepping on a snake at night.

Do not cut a snake bite. Wipe and clean the bite. Wash eyes if sprayed with venom. Stop the bitten limb from moving. Put a stick next to the limb. Wrap a cloth firmly but not tightly around the limb. Take the patient to a (city) hospital immediately. If the snake is dead take it to the hospital with the patient. If the snake is not dead, leave the snake alone. Remember that even a dead snake's head can still inject poison. Turn the patient on his side if he vomits.

Scorpions and spiders

Scorpion stings are usually extremely painful. Some can cause internal damage. Seek medical help. Only a few spiders inject venom into people. Seek medical help if bitten.

Worm infections

Certain worms, present in sand and soil in many tropical and subtropical areas, infect people through the skin.

Wear shoes and avoid lying directly on sand especially when above the high water line.