

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Spider Bites

Date: August 30, 2017

Location: Whitewater, Rebel and Horse Creek Complex; Willamette National Forest; Oregon



Spider bites on one of the victims on this fire complex. As explained in this RLS, the type of the necessary treatment that is required depends on how long you ignore the bite.

These spider bite incidents have all advanced to a serious level due to the time lapse between being bit and coming into the Medical Unit for treatment. Yes, we all know you don't want to be taken off the line working. All the more reason to get attention earlier.

NARRATIVE

This fire complex's medical units have seen an increase in spider bite issues. During the last ten days, four firefighters have experienced spider bites.

Although we cannot positively identify what spider we're dealing with—because no one has yet seen them—the locals are a great source of information when trying to identify the species. They are telling us that the culprit is most likely a hobo spider.



The hobo spider

In the fall, spiders become more aggressive when they are getting ready to reproduce. Their venom is more potent.

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Spider Bite Chronology, Warnings, and What Steps to Take

Day 1

First Sign: You may see the spider after feeling the bite. (Although, so far, this has not been the case on the spider bite incidents on our fires.) If possible, take a picture of the spider.

Second Sign: Itching, burning, or irritation at the bite site. Expose the area. A spider bite has two fangs, leaving two punctures at the site. In time, it might show a pinkish discoloration at the bite site. Rather small in size. Smaller than a mosquito bite.

If you suspect a spider bite, clean the area with antiseptic wipes to disinfect as much of the area as possible. Do not try to pinch or squeeze the venom out. This could inject the venom deeper into your skin.

Spider bites carry a lot of germs. If left untreated, the bite could result in “sepsis” (the presence of harmful bacteria and their toxins, typically through infection of a wound). This means that the venom will spread through your system, causing fever and other serious symptoms which—if not treated—will land you in the hospital.

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Day 2

You most likely aren't concerned. Nothing significant has changed. You therefore think you are out of the woods. You therefore don't go into the Medical Unit to get this bite checked out.

Day 3

In the morning, you may give the bite area a quick glance. You're good. You still aren't concerned. You go out on the line.

Later in the afternoon, you start noticing changes. By the time you come back into camp, you start noticing even more changes. Even so, when you arrive in camp, instead of going to Medical, you go to dinner instead. (Yeah, we know your priorities!)

After dinner, you start to get concerned about the bite.

By now, the bite is showing obvious signs of infection. Usually, it has become a protruding, distorted bump on your skin. If you've experienced more than one bite, you are starting to look like a crater field! The redness has increased; the bites have abscessed.

Depending on how long you have ignored the bite will determine the type of necessary treatment that is required. Expect an IV with super-strong antibiotics. They may also have to drain the abscess. It looks gross. You regret not doing something sooner. May leave a scar.

You start to think that your crew will think that you are weak. But, you know something isn't right. So you get your Crew Boss and ask them to go to Medical with you. The EMTs take a look and get your history.

The determination is made that you need an ambulance ride to the closest hospital Emergency Room. You complain that you don't want to go—you don't want to miss the next shift on the fire. We also want you out on the line. But we have to get you better first!

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The Question for Everyone is:
***Will you go to the Med tent as soon as you suspect
you have been bitten by a spider?
Only time will tell!***

LESSONS

- ❖ Keep spider bite areas clean.
- ❖ Seek IMMEDIATE treatment to avoid going into a severe sepsis situation.
- ❖ We've had issues with all of the spider bite incidents on this fire complex. (After the third day is when the more adverse symptoms occur.) The worst case was the spider bite patient who had to spend five days in the Intensive Care Unit with sepsis. Another spider bite victim was released from the Emergency Room with a heavy dose of antibiotics. One of the other spider bite victims was taken to the hospital where the infected bites were lanced and drained. This person was also put on heavy antibiotics and will hopefully be available to return to work by the crew's next tour of duty.

For more info and lessons on spiders and spider bites—including some tips on how to avoid these bites—check out this RLS from the 2015 Kettle Fire Complex in Washington:

<https://www.wildfirelessons.net/viewdocument/black-widow-spiders-2015>

This RLS was submitted by:
Medical Unit Leader Trainee

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