

# Insect bites and stings: antimicrobial prescribing

## Assessment

Assess the type and severity of the bite or sting to identify:

- a local inflammatory or allergic skin reaction
- erythema migrans (bullseye rash), a sign of Lyme disease
- symptoms or signs of an infection
- a systemic reaction

For people with a known or suspected tick bite, follow the [NICE guideline on Lyme disease](#)

Be aware that:

- a rapid-onset skin reaction is likely to be an inflammatory or allergic reaction rather than an infection
- most insect bites or stings will not need antibiotics

## Advice

Advise people that:

- a community pharmacist can advise about self-care treatments
- skin redness and itching are common and may last for up to 10 days
- it is unlikely that the skin will become infected
- avoiding scratching may reduce inflammation and the risk of infection
- they should seek medical help if symptoms develop or worsen rapidly or significantly at any time, or they become systemically unwell



Insect bites and stings



Refer people to hospital if they have symptoms or signs suggesting a more serious illness or condition, such as a systemic allergic reaction (see the [NICE guideline on anaphylaxis](#))

Consider referral or seeking specialist advice for people if:

- they are systemically unwell
- they are severely immunocompromised, and have symptoms or signs of an infection
- they have had a previous systemic allergic reaction to the same type of bite or sting
- the bite or sting is in the mouth or throat, or around the eyes
- it has been caused by an unusual or exotic insect
- they have fever or persisting lesions associated with a bite or sting that occurred while travelling outside the UK



**Do not offer an antibiotic if there are no symptoms or signs of infection**

Be aware that people may wish to consider oral antihistamines (in people aged over 1 year) to help relieve itching, even though there is uncertainty about their effectiveness. Some antihistamines cause sedation, which may help at night.



**If there are symptoms or signs of infection, see the [recommendations on antibiotic choice in the NICE guideline on cellulitis and erysipelas](#)**

Reassess if:

- symptoms or signs of an infection develop
- the person's condition worsens rapidly or significantly or they become systemically unwell
- the person has severe pain out of proportion to the wound, which may indicate the presence of toxin-producing bacteria

Take account of other possible diagnoses, such as Lyme disease indicated by erythema migrans

When exercising their judgement, professionals and practitioners are expected to take this guideline fully into account, alongside the individual needs, preferences and values of their patients or the people using their service. It is not mandatory to apply the recommendations, and the guideline does not override the responsibility to make decisions appropriate to the circumstances of the individual, in consultation with them and their families and carers or guardian.