

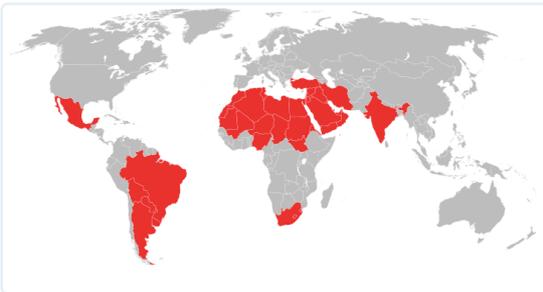
Disease Information Sheets

Scorpion stings



Introduction

Most scorpion stings, although painful, are not dangerous. There are approximately 1500 species of scorpion around the world, but only about thirty of these are considered a threat to human health. Scorpions are unobtrusive and shy to the point of timidity, avoiding confrontation. They rarely venture from their lairs (under rocks or in underground burrows, depending on the species), except when seeking prey - insects, spiders and small creatures. Scorpions are nocturnal and visually impaired, but possess other highly developed sensory organs to measure terrain and detect their prey. Scorpions can withstand both high and low temperatures, very low humidity, and can live without food for a year.



How common are they?

Whilst scorpions have been recorded from all of the five continents, including along the northern Mediterranean and southern Europe, there are seven areas that have been identified as at most risk: north-Saharan Africa, the Africa Sahel, South Africa, Middle-East, South India, Mexico and South America east of the Andes. There are more than 1.2 million stings reported annually leading to more than 3250 deaths, with children at greatest risk of death.

Are travellers and/or expat workers at risk?

Yes - particularly if you are camping or hiking. Scorpions like dark, warm places in which to hide from the daylight - the inside of a boot is perfect. When confronted with a mild threat such as a person's hand close by, the scorpion may undertake a defensive sting using only a small amount of its venom gland content. However, if accidentally trampled, touched, or rolled on by a sleeping human, the scorpion is likely to inject a substantial quantity of venom, producing more severe illness.

What is the illness?

Local symptoms usually involve an intense burning pain, which persists for 20 minutes to several hours. The site may swell and/or become numb, red, tender and tingly. Most scorpion stings only result in local symptoms which are painful but not life threatening. Entry wounds are not normally visible. Systemic symptoms may accompany local symptoms. These include an increase in muscle tone and muscle contractions, with convulsions in severe cases. The patient may sweat, salivate and have an increased pulse rate, which may become irregular. Fatal respiratory or cardiac failure are possible.

How are stings prevented?

- Inspect and shake out clothing, boots, towels, sleeping bags and equipment before use
- Sleep under a mosquito net that is well tucked in and use a torch if you're walking around at night
- Wear long-sleeved clothing and trousers, gloves, boots etc if disturbing rocks or other places scorpions may hide
- Keep your camp tidy - so there are fewer hiding places
- If you find a scorpion keep calm and remove it to a safe place gently and slowly using tongs (or something similar)

How should stings be treated in the field?

Local symptoms can be eased by applying a cold pack to the sting site - this may take an hour or two before it improves. In order to be effective cold treatment must be started within a few minutes of the sting. If there are systemic symptoms then urgent medical attention is required, preferably at a well-equipped medical facility with experienced and well-trained staff as advanced medical care may be required.

SCORPION STINGS

Inspect and shake out boots, bedding etc.

Wear long sleeves and trousers, boots, etc.

Be careful if turning over rocks or disturbing other potential hiding places

Sleep under a mosquito net that is well tucked in

Use a torch at night



NEED MEDICAL ADVICE FOR YOUR WORK OR TRAVEL IN REMOTE AREAS?

Sentinel Consulting provides support services for people travelling and working in remote or resource-poor locations. Services include:

- Pre-travel medical screening and advice
- Risk management including risk assessment, emergency response planning and medical facility inspections
- 24-hour medical support from wilderness specialist doctors
- Operational support including call-ins, incident support and liaison
- Medical bags (prescription and non-prescription drugs) and first aid kits

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