Self Care Briefing – Insect Bites and Stings

Rationale
- Most insect bites and stings are not serious and will get better within a few hours or days.
- Over-the-counter treatments can help ease symptoms, such as painkillers, creams for itching and antihistamines.

Recommendations for clinicians
- Provide the patient with a ‘non-prescription’ sheet or a patient information leaflet to promote education about minor conditions suitable for self-care when appropriate.
- Advise patients of safe and effective self-care measures:
  - Remove the sting or tick if it is still in the skin.
  - Wash the affected area with soap and water and apply a cold compress for at least 10 minutes.
  - Raise or elevate the affected area if possible to reduce swelling and avoid scratching the area.
  - Avoid traditional home remedies, such as vinegar and bicarbonate of soda, as they are unlikely to help.
- Advise patients to seek medical attention and consider treatment with a prescription in the following circumstances:
  - Symptoms do not start to improve within a few days or are getting worse.
  - The sting or bite is in the mouth or throat, or near eyes.
  - A large area (around 10cm or more) around the bite becomes red and swollen.
  - Symptoms of a wound infection, such as pus or increasing pain, swelling or redness.
  - Symptoms of a more widespread infection, such as a fever, swollen glands and other flu-like symptoms.
Urgent medical assessment is required if any of the following are present: A fast heart rate, wheezing or difficulty breathing, nausea or vomiting, a swollen face, mouth or throat and other “red flag” symptoms.

Example of products available to buy over the counter*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paracetamol (tablets)</td>
<td>Not licensed for under 10 years (25p-£3 for 16 tablets/capsules); Suspension - Not licensed for under 2 months (£2.50-£4.50 for 100ml)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibuprofen (tablets)</td>
<td>Not licensed for under 12 years (35p-£4.00 for 16 tablets/capsules); Suspension – Not licensed under the age of 3 months (£2.50-£4.00 for 100ml)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlorphenamine (tablets)</td>
<td>Not licensed for under 6 years (£3.00-£4.00 for 30 tablets); Syrup - Not licensed for under 1 year (£3.80-£5.00 for 150ml)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cetirizine</td>
<td>Not suitable for children under 2; Not available OTC if breast feeding or pregnant (~99p-£5.50 for 14 tablets, ~£1.25 - £7.14 for 100mls syrup)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrocortisone 1% cream</td>
<td>Not licensed for children under 10 years (~£3.49 for 15g)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Prices correct at time of writing and are subject to change

Optimising medicines across the boroughs of Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton & Wandsworth

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