

Black Widow Bite Poisonous, Painful

By DR. K. H. SUTHERLAND
County Health Officer

About the only spider of medical importance in Los Angeles County is the black widow (*Latrodectus mactans*) and this importance is due to the fact that its bite is both painful and poisonous.

Another species of spider whose bite causes extreme necrosis or destruction of the surrounding tissue has also been reported from this area in recent years. This species is much fewer in number than

the black widow and is therefore not considered as great a hazard. In part of the country, the spider to look out for is the black widow.

BLACK WIDOW bites are not reportable to health authorities so no record of the actual number of bites that occur is available. No doubt the widow is blamed for more bites than actually happen just because she inhabits the country.

It is estimated, however,

that about 40 cases of arachnidism (spider poisoning) are admitted to local hospitals each year, with about 10 to 15 per cent of this number being retained for further hospital care subsequent to the usual first aid treatment. No death from this cause has occurred in Los Angeles County since 1956.

The bite is usually a single one and consists of two puncture marks which are generally quickly surrounded by a red hive reaction. The bite as al-

ready stated, is painful and is usually followed by systemic symptoms which may begin as early as 10 minutes after the bite or be delayed for several hours.

SIGNS of black widow spider poisoning include abdominal pain and rigidity of the abdominal muscles, restlessness, nausea, dizziness, headache, profuse perspiration and difficulty in speech. Since the venom affects the nervous system,

it may cause some temporary paralysis.

The severity of the reaction depends on the condition of the victim, if there is an allergy to the toxin, the amount of toxin injected, and the promptness with which first aid treatment is started.

Treatment consists of the administration of specific antivenom which is especially useful if given soon after the bite occurs. Medication may also be given to control the muscle spasms that may occur in some instances.

SIMPLER MEASURES to make the individual more comfortable before the arrival of

medical aid consists of immersion in a warm bath to relieve muscular spasms while cold compresses or ice may be applied to the site of the wound to lessen local discomfort. Warmth and quiet are advised.

The black widow has a characteristic and easily recognized appearance. It is glossy black with a round shoe-buttonlike abdomen that is usually, but not always, marked with a red hourglass-like shape. It ranges from one to one-and-a-quarter inches in length, including the legs. The web is tough and untidy and the widow often assumes an upside down position within it. The male black widow is relatively harmless, is not as

large, is a grayish-black, and may be marked with red and yellow spots and stripes.

THE BLACK widow likes darkness and seclusion and may therefore be found in such places as garages, outbuildings, under a house, in thick hedges, under piles of debris, in fence corners, or in dark, warm closets within the house.

Eradication of the black widow is recommended whenever it is found. Removal of possible dwelling places around the premises and periodic check-up and spraying of favored areas will be effective in keeping them under control. There are many excellent in-

secticide sprays on the market and direction for use are always given on the container.

PEOPLE ARE not often bitten by the black widow as it is really very timid and keeps out of the way if at all possible. In the event an individual is bitten, medical assistance should be obtained as quickly as possible.

A pamphlet giving additional information on the black widow will be mailed to anyone who sends a card of request to the Division of Health Education, Los Angeles County Health Department, 241 N. Figueroa St., Los Angeles 12.

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SINGS SUNDAY . . Denielle La Vone Smith was the soloist in Easter services Sunday at the Harbor City Christian School which she attends. She sang Saturday evening at Leuzinger High. She is the daughter of Mrs. Alice Smith, 1438 W. 214th St., and a pupil of Mrs. Fay Newman.

Agriculture Workers to Get Benefit

Beginning on May 1, agricultural workers in Torrance and vicinity may claim benefits for disabling injuries and illnesses not connected with their work under an amendment to the California Unemployment Insurance Code enacted by the 1961 legislature and signed into law by Governor Edmund G. Brown, it was announced yesterday by V. L. Hetzel, manager of the Department of Employment's District Disability Insurance Office in Long Beach.

Hetzel estimated that about 1,700 farm workers in the area served by the Long Beach office are covered by the new program, for which farm workers have been paying through a one per cent deduction from their wages since last Oct. 1.

Hetzel pointed out that a farm worker must have received wages of at least \$300 in the three-month period ending last Dec. 31 in order to qualify for disability and hospital benefits on claims beginning in May, June, or July.

THE WEEKLY benefit amount may range from a low of \$10 to a high of \$70, and is based on the claimant's wages during the highest paid quarter of his base period.

Claimants who are hospitalized are entitled to \$12 a day in hospitalization benefits for a maximum of 20 days in addition to whatever they are drawing in basic disability benefits. Basic disability benefits are paid for each day beginning with the eighth day of disability, or the first day of hospital confinement, whichever comes first.

Disability insurance is designed to serve the claimant by mail. Claim forms may be obtained from any Department of Employment office and will be mailed on request by telephone or letter. They also may be obtained from a doctor's office or hospital.

THE CLAIMANT completes his portion of the form, listing his Social Security number, and sends the form to his doctor, who must certify to the patient's disability before any benefits can be paid. It is most important to file for disability benefits promptly upon becoming disabled. Late filing may result in delay or loss of benefits.

Manager Hetzel said that free literature giving further information about disability insurance and hospital benefits may be obtained from any Department of Employment office.