

Black Widow Is Useful as Well As Poisonous

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K. H. SUTHERLAND, M.D.
 County Health Officer
 The spider of chief medical significance in Los Angeles County is the black widow, and local hospitals admit between 30 and 40 persons for emergency treatment every year as a result of its poisonous bite. Though it is always necessary to hospitalize a certain number of these individuals for a few days because of the severity of the reaction, deaths from

arachnidism (spider poisoning) are rare. In recent years, cases of spider poisoning supposedly caused by a brown spider with a violin-shaped decoration on top (*Loxosceles reclusa*) have also been reported in this area, although entomologists cannot confirm its presence here. The spider is well known in the Middle West and is considered about as lethal as the black widow. Its bite characteristically

results in destruction (necrosis) of tissue around the area where the bite occurs. **ALL SPIDERS** have poison fangs and all of them may bite. With an occasional exception here and there throughout the United States, all spiders are harmless and are timid as well. Generally, the amount of poison they produce is just enough to help them capture their insect food supply, and

this is even true of the tarantula which some people find so fearsome. When these spiders do bite a person, the toxin usually results in nothing more than a superficial, localized irritation that, at most, lasts no longer than half an hour or so. **LIKE OTHER** spiders, the black widow is useful in so far as it feeds on harmful insects, but this virtue is overshadowed

by the fact that its venom is very potent and, considering the little creature's size, quite plentiful. Yet some persons suffer little or no effects when bitten, though others may experience a great deal of discomfort. In most cases this variation of reaction is due to the fact that the widow may inject either a large or moderate amount of poison when she bites, or none at all. For simply by exercising the complicated muscles that surround the poison glands, she can regulate the amount of poison given to a victim.

the label should be followed when the substance is used. **FIRST AID** in black widow bites usually consists of applying a reliable antiseptic to the wound. The application of cold compresses or ice may relieve local discomfort until medical aid can be obtained, but stimulants are the form of alcohol should not be given.

It may be some comfort to those persons who are bitten by the black widow spider to know that, in the vast majority of cases, the illness or distress produced by the spider-bite poisoning generally lasts no more than a few days and is often over in several hours. Still, in cases where some systemic illness may be aggravated, or where the victim is very old or very young or is sensitive to the toxin, the widow's bite must be regarded as potentially dangerous and treated as a medical emergency. A pamphlet giving additional information on the black widow spider will be mailed to anyone who sends a card of request to the Division of Health Education, Los Angeles County Health Dept., 241 N. Figueroa St., Los Angeles 12.

Robert A. Mosher of Gansevoort, N.Y., has been promoted to airman first class in the United States Air Force. Airman Mosher is a jet aircraft mechanic assigned to the 93rd Organizational Maintenance Squadron at Castle AFB, Calif. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond C. Mosher of 2914 Palos Verdes Blvd., and a graduate of North High School.

Gary R. Pfingston has been promoted to A-2c in the United States Air Force. Airman Pfingston is a jet aircraft mechanic assigned to the 93rd Organizational Maintenance Squadron at Castle AFB. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Owen Pfingston of 5648 Marielinda Ave. He is a graduate of Torrance High School and attended El Camino College. His wife, Marsha, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Hansen of 3126 Torrance Blvd.

We have too often tried to replace the torch of learning with the pocket lighter of adjustment to environment. — Dr. Max Rafferty.



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