

## When Children Bite, What are the Risk

**What are the risks?** Even with every precaution, injuries still happen in day care centers. By nature, children are very active, and some may be aggressive or anxious. They may push, shove or even bite another child while playing. If a playmate bites your child, you may be worried about the possibility of infection. This information sheet provides accurate information about the risks of human bites and how to care for bite wounds properly.

### **My child was bitten by another at the day care center. Does that happen frequently?**

Children in day care centers often bite, but most bites are harmless and don't break the skin. Surveys have shown that up to half of all children in day care centers were bitten during a one-year period. Most bites happened in September at the beginning of the day care year. Toddlers (age 13 to 24 months) were bitten most frequently. Bites were most often to the arms and the face. Only one bite in 50 (2%) broke the skin. No child had to be taken to the doctor because of a bite.

### **Is there a risk that the bite wound might become infected?**

Only rarely do wounds from human bites become infected, and these infections usually result from fights among adults. Severe bites are unusual in day care centers and almost never lead to bacterial infections.

### **Hepatitis viruses and human immunodeficiency virus**

Hepatitis B is usually transmitted by contact of the mucous membranes, such as the mouth or the eyes, with blood or saliva from infected people. The virus is not transmitted by simple contact of saliva with normal skin. Only a bite that breaks the skin can transmit hepatitis B virus. A child with hepatitis B who bites another and breaks the skin may expose the child who was bitten to hepatitis B infection. Another high-risk situation occurs when an unvaccinated child bites an infected one, and the blood from the infected child enters the biter's mouth. If that happens, a doctor should treat a child who is not vaccinated against hepatitis B.

### **How to care for bite wounds in a day care center?**

If your child was bitten by another at the day care center, here is what you should do. If the skin is not broken, clean the wound with soap and water, apply a cold compress and soothe your child gently. If the skin is broken,

- \*let the wound bleed gently;
- \*clean the wound carefully with soap and water;
- \*apply a mild antiseptic;
- \*check whether your child has been vaccinated against tetanus and make sure that the shot is up-to-date;
- \*watch the wound over the next few days;
- \*if it gets red or begins to swell, call your doctor; and
- \*talk with your doctor about whether your child needs a vaccine against hepatitis B.

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