

# Bitten abroad, an unforgettable souvenir: a review of bites and stings reported to the UK National Poisons Information Service sustained whilst travelling overseas 2009-2019

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## Introduction

International travel has increased steadily over the past 20 years and in 2019 there were 93.1 million visits abroad made by UK residents.[1]

## Objective

To report on cases where advice from the NPIS was sought on the management of patients who sustained bites or stings whilst travelling overseas.

## Methods

A retrospective analysis of UK NPIS enquiries between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2019 was undertaken for enquiries relating to bites and stings and specifically for those that occurred overseas.

## Results

There were 142 enquiries regarding 131 patients during this period; 116 (89%) were adults and 15 (11%) were children (under 18 years of age).

The travel history was known in 127 cases (97%), and included a total of 41 different countries across six continents (Figure 1), with Europe the most frequently visited (n= 53) followed by North America (n= 28) and Asia (n=24). The most common regions where exposures occurred were Spain (including Islands) (n=20), the Caribbean islands (n=16) and Greece (including Islands) (n=10).

The majority of exposures (n=79, 57%) involved marine life. Jellyfish (n= 25) and sea urchins (n= 25) were the most common, followed by fish (n=18), 7 of which were stonefish and 4 weever fish. The remaining 11 exposures involved 7 stingrays, 2 sea anemones, one octopus and one fire coral.

Of the remaining 52 exposures, 19 involved spiders, 11 insects, 7 scorpions, 6 snakes, 5 monkeys, 1 parrot, 1 dog, 1 worm and a chimpanzee. The site of the bite/sting was known in 94 cases of which 42 occurred on the foot.

The maximum poisoning severity score [2] was known in 129 cases and was none in 14, minor in 98, moderate in 15 and severe in 2. The two severe cases involved a bite from a Common Lancehead snake in Trinidad and a sea urchin in Barbados.

The advice of a clinical toxicologist was sought in 24 exposures, of which 8 were referred to a clinical toxinologist for further specialist advice.

## Conclusions

Bites and stings sustained overseas are an infrequent and unusual type of enquiry for poison centres. Healthcare professionals and poison centre staff need to be aware of the potential for patients to seek medical advice from them upon their return.

## References:

- <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/traveltrends/2019>
- Persson HE, Sjöberg GK, Haines JA, De Garbino JP. Poisoning severity score. Grading of acute poisoning. *J Toxicol Clin Toxicol.* 1998; 36: 205-213.

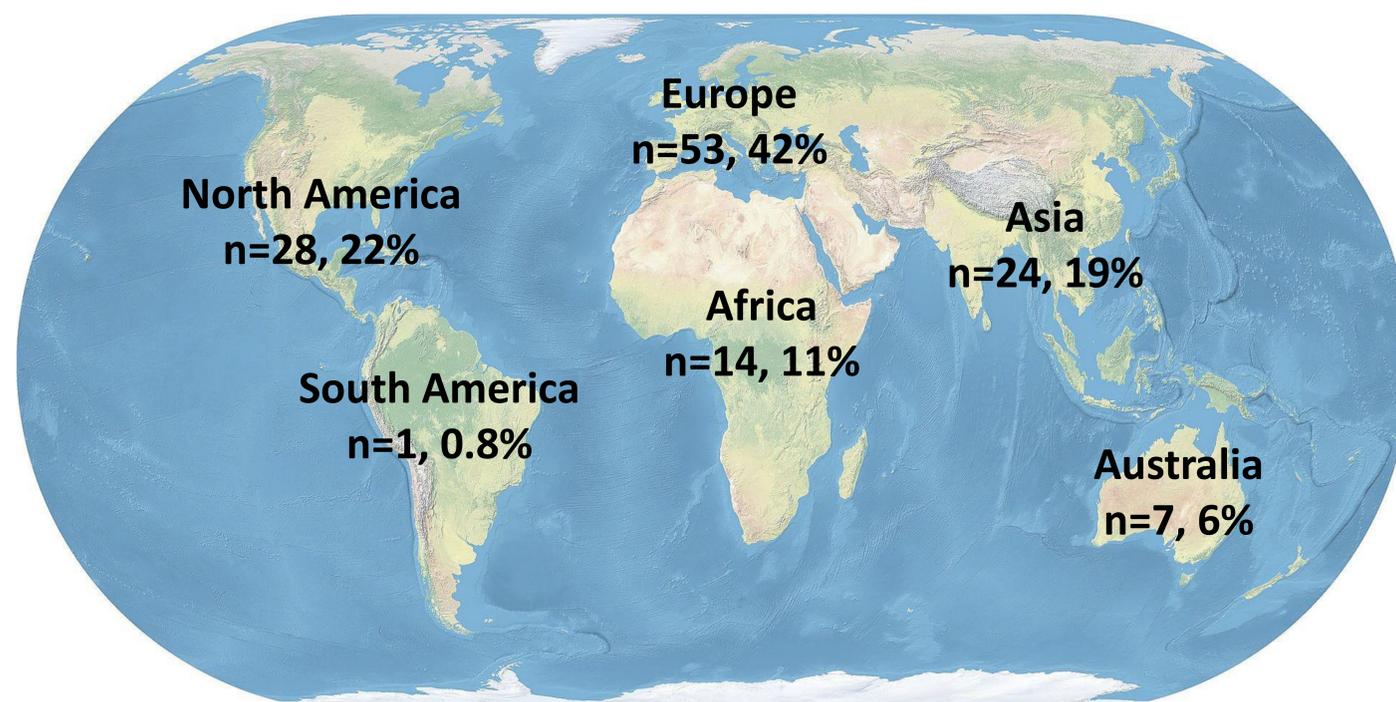


Figure 1:  
Geographical distribution of bites and stings.