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| **First Aid: Animal Bites**  Animal bites and scratches that break the skin can sometimes cause infection. Some bites need to be closed with stitches while others heal on their own.  Rarely, animal bites (particularly from wild animals) can lead to rabies, a life-threatening disease. Bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes transmit most cases of rabies.  **What to Do**   * Wash the bite area with soap and water; apply pressure with sterile gauze or a clean cloth if the bite is bleeding. * If the bleeding has stopped, apply antibiotic ointment. * Cover the area with a bandage or sterile gauze. * Offer your child acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain.   **Seek Medical Care**  **If:**   * the bite was from:   + a wild or stray animal   + a pet that isn't up-to-date on rabies shots   + an animal that is acting strangely * the bite has broken the skin * the bite is on the face, head, neck, hand, foot, or near a joint * a bite or scratch becomes red, hot, swollen, or increasingly painful * your child is behind on shots or has not had a tetanus shot within 5 years   When seeking treatment, have the following information on hand:   * the kind of animal that bit your child * the date of the animal's last rabies vaccination, if known * any recent unusual behavior by the animal * the animal's location, if known * if the animal was a stray or wild, or was captured by a local animal control service * your child's immunization (shots) record * a list of any medicines your child is allergic to   **Think Prevention!**  Many animal bites can be prevented. Always keep a close eye on young kids around animals, even pets. Teach kids not to tease pets, to handle them gently, and to stay away from wild or stray animals.  Reviewed by: Steven Dowshen, MD Date reviewed: April 2014 |
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