

An insect bite isn't just an insect bite

Bear in mind the story is quite old but did happen to me

by Petrina Clarke, Melbourne, Australia

WHEN AN INSECT BITE ISN'T JUST AN INSECT BITE.

When 25 year old Petrina had a chance to visit South Africa, she jumped at the chance to experience a new culture and unique adventure.

What she didn't expect was an encounter with a human parasite that could have been deadly.

We all know those stories of someone being bitten by something during the night and awoken with lumps on their neck or arms.

The lump or (bite) wasn't sore so presumed it was just an insect bite and ignored it, but the lump continued to increase in size.

When I returned to Australia I was so alarmed I went to the casualty ward of a well known infectious diseases hospital. The doctor drained the lump and dozens of tiny black spiders came pouring out.

For me, this tale is not simply an urban myth, but one that mirrors her own experience. In preparation for her holiday, Petrina had made sure she had received all the regulation vaccines and took with her malaria tablets and other appropriate medicines.

With two of her five week trip to go, Petrina and her travelling companion were staying at Mabula Lodge, a private game reserve, situated North of Johannesburg.

"We stayed at the lodge for a week, it was really impressive with the animals just wandering around.

It wasn't until we started the return trip to Durban that I really noticed the bite, I thought it was just a mosquito bite. I had been itching a little bit but it was progressively getting worse, so much so, that my friend told me off for scratching so much.

I had probably been scratching for about 3 days then decided to have a good look at it ...it was at the back of my leg, at the top, so it was difficult to see but I thought it looked more like a blackhead or a boil, rather than a mosquito bite. My partner offered to have a go at squeezing it. At first he thought it was just pus coming out but then he realized it was an insect larva.

I was told by locals that it was a "tumbu". The Putzi Fly. Eggs are deposited on dirt (generally on the floors of native huts) and the larva that hatch within a day or so penetrate the skin of people who have been in contact with soil. This can lead to Myiasis or infestation of the body with larva.

Ever since this experience, and now that I am back in Australia mosquitoes love me, I was never affected by them before, now they come after me all the time. Oh well thank goodness for the Aeroguard or Rid.

Copyright © Petrina Clarke, Melbourne, Australia 2007 - All Rights Reserved.