

PARABUTHUS



BURROWING



TREE / ROCK



BLACK WIDOW



SAC SPIDER



BABOON SPIDER



SAND SPIDER



VIOLIN SPIDER





## THICK TAIL • PARABUTHUS

Parabuthus (thick-tailed scorpions) species have highly toxic venoms which they use to overpower their prey and drive off adversaries by stinging them. Parabuthus species are very aggressive and will sting readily. When disturbed, they raise their abdomens off the ground and curl their tails up tightly, ready to flick the sting forward.

The sting causes immediate excruciating pain of a burning sensation. The pain lasts for a variable period, usually extending from a few hours to one day, maybe longer. Within an hour, however, systemic symptoms may also be experienced and hospitalisation is recommended. These symptoms include:

- Raised blood pressure (*P. granulatus*)
- Increased perspiration
- Increased salivation, difficulty in swallowing and speech
- Difficulty in breathing (which is the primary cause of death)
- Muscle pain and cramps
- General weakness
- Stiff gait and unable to stand and walk
- Headaches, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, urine retention
- Restlessness

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Children who have been stung may have signs and symptoms similar to those seen in adults, but the most outstanding clinical feature is a unique form of restlessness, characterised by crying and screaming, uncontrollable jerking of the extremities, chaotic thrashing movements, flailing and writhing. The patient is unable to lie still and is difficult to restrain. This restlessness has been described as “extraordinary and duplicated by little else in medicine”.

The spectrum and degree of symptoms is determined by a number of factors, including the species involved, the body mass and physical health of the victim, and the amount of venom injected. Those with lung and heart problems are at greater risk. Deaths, resulting from respiratory and/or heart failure have occurred in Zimbabwe as a result of stings from *Parabuthus transvaalicus* and *P. granulatus*. Anti-venom is available from the South African Institute of Medical Research, Johannesburg, and should be applied by a medical doctor without delay. Intravenous administration of calcium gluconate is moderately effective for relief of generalised muscle pain and cramp, but its effect lasts for 20-30 minutes only and there is also a limit to the amount that can be administered.

If eye envenomation occurs, wash the patient’s eye out with clean running water.

Morphine and derivatives, barbiturates and meperidine **SHOULD NOT BE USED** for the treatment of pain, as these drugs induce synergistic reactions with scorpion venoms which greatly increase the convulsions and the possibility of death.

