



Poison or Venom?

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Many animals and plants use toxins to protect themselves or catch food. But did you know that venom and poison are not the same? They can both be dangerous but work differently.

What is Poison?

Poison is a toxin that works when you touch, eat, or breathe it. The poisonous plant or animal does not inject the toxin. You get poisoned by coming into contact with it.

Some naturally occurring chemicals such as arsenic, mercury, and lead can be found in soil and water. They can cause serious illness or death if ingested in large amounts.

Examples

- Some **frogs** have poison on their skin.
- The **pufferfish** is poisonous if you eat its flesh.
- Some **mushrooms** are deadly if you eat them.
- A **stinging nettle** is a plant that irritates your skin if you touch them.

What is Venom?

Venom is a toxin that an animal injects into another animal. This usually happens through a bite or sting. The animal must actively put the venom into your body. Venom can attack your nerves (neurotoxins) or your blood (hemotoxins), depending on the animal.

Examples

- **Snakes** use their fangs to inject venom when they bite you.
- **Scorpions, bees, and wasps** sting with a sharp stinger. Scorpions inject venom with their stingers whereas bees and wasps leave their stingers in your body.
- **Jellyfish** and some types of plants have stingers too, but they work differently from a bee stinger. They are special cells that deliver venom when you touch the animal or plant.

Remember This Tip

- It is **venomous** if **it** bites or stings **you** and you get sick.
- It is **poisonous** if **you** touch, eat, drink, or inject **it** and get sick.

Vocabulary

Study the vocabulary that you saw in the passage.

fang / fæŋ / (noun; plural **fangs** / fæŋz /) • the long, sharp teeth of a venomous snake by which poison is injected; a dog's long tooth.

Example: *Snakes open their mouths and show their sharp fangs when they are ready to bite.*

inject / ɪn'dʒekt / (verb) • to force a liquid medicine, drug, or chemical into someone or something by using a needle or needle-like means.

Example: *When I was in the hospital, they injected me with a powerful drug twice a day.*

nerve / nɜrv / (noun; plural **nerves** / nɜrvz /) long, thin cells in your body that control movement and feeling by carrying messages between the brain and other parts of the body.

Example: *This insect's venom causes pain by attacking your nerves.*

sting / strɪŋ / (noun) • an injury caused when an insect or animal stings (or "bites") you.

Example: *Bee stings can be very painful.*

sting / strɪŋ / (verb; **sting, stinging, stung, stung**) • (of insects, plants, or animals) to break the skin with a sharp, pointed part that may contain venom.

Example: *A bee stung me in the garden.*

stinger / strɪŋ ər / noun • the sharp, pointed part that some insects and plants use to break the skin to cause pain or inject venom into their victim.

Example: *When a bee stings you, it loses its stinger and dies shortly afterwards.*

toxin / 'tɒk sɪn / noun • a poisonous substance or chemical, especially one that is produced by an animal or plant.

Example: *Stay away from this plant! It has a powerful toxin that can make you sick.*

venom / 'ven əm / noun • poisonous substance or chemical that some animals (certain snakes, spiders, insects) introduce into the bodies of their victims by biting, stinging, etc.

Example: *This spider's venom is very powerful.*

venomous / 'ven əm əz/ adjective • something that has venom and can hurt you.

Example: *Some snakes are friendly, but some can be very venomous.*



Comprehension Questions

Instructions. Answer the following questions based on the information in the passage. When you are done, see “Answer Key” to check your answers.

1. What is the main difference between venom and poison?
 - a. Venom is eaten; poison is injected.
 - b. Poisonous plants are always more dangerous than venomous animals.
 - c. Venom is injected; poison is touched, eaten, or breathed.
2. What does venom do?
 - a. It helps some animals run from their predators.
 - b. It attacks the nerves or blood.
 - c. It protects plants from the sun.
3. What do snakes use to inject venom?
 - a. Their tails
 - b. Their skin
 - c. Their fangs
4. What happens when a bee stings you?
 - a. It gives you poison from its skin and causes skin issues.
 - b. It leaves its stinger in your body and dies.
 - c. It stings you several times before it flies away.
5. What can happen if you eat a poisonous mushroom?
 - a. You will feel nervous for a couple of hours.
 - b. You may become very sick or die.
 - c. Your skin will get irritated.
6. What is one example of a plant that can irritate your skin?
 - a. A cactus.
 - b. A stinging nettle.
 - c. A sunflower.
7. What kind of poison can be found in soil and water?
 - a. Arsenic and mercury.
 - b. Lead.
 - c. All of the above.
8. What does a jellyfish use to give venom?
 - a. Its mouth.
 - b. Its tentacles with special cells
 - c. Its feet
9. What is a toxin? (*Choose the best answer.*)
 - a. It's a poisonous substance or chemical, especially one that is produced by an animal or plant.
 - b. It's the chemical of poisons.
 - c. It's a poison that causes skin irritation.



Vocabulary Exercises

Vocabulary Exercise 1: Instructions

Fill in the blanks with one of the vocabulary words in the passage. Write the whole word in the blank provided, paying close attention to spelling and word form.

1. Bees use their _____ to inject venom into their victims.
2. This snake's _____ has a very powerful _____ that affects your nervous system.
3. Leave that bee alone! It's going to _____ you.
4. There are many _____ snakes in Australia.
5. Snakes use their fangs to _____ venom into your body when they bite you.

Vocabulary Exercise 2: Instructions

Fill in each blank with the vocabulary word that matches the meaning provided. Write the whole word in the blank provided, paying close attention to spelling and word form.

1. _____ • to use something sharp to break the skin (speaking about certain insects)
2. _____ • a harmful substance made by plants or animals
3. _____ • a toxin that is dangerous if eaten, touched, or breathed in.
4. _____ • a harmful substance that an animal puts into another body.
5. _____ • to put something into the body with a bite or needle.



Answer Key

Comprehension Questions

- | | | |
|------|------|------|
| 1. c | 4. b | 7. c |
| 2. b | 5. b | 8. b |
| 3. c | 6. b | 9. a |

Vocabulary Exercise 1

1. Bees use their stingers to inject venom into their victims.
2. This snake's venom has a very powerful toxin that affects your nervous system.
3. Leave that bee alone! It's going to sting you.
4. There are many venomous snakes in Australia.
5. Snakes use their fangs to inject venom into your body when they bite you.

Vocabulary Exercise 2

6. sting • to use something sharp to break the skin (speaking about certain insects)
7. toxin • a harmful substance made by plants or animals
8. poison • a toxin that is dangerous if eaten, touched, or breathed in.
9. venom • a harmful substance that an animal puts into another body.
10. inject • to put something into the body with a bite or needle.

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