

# Lending a Helping Hand

## Hand Center saves Paul's finger from infected bite

When Paul Harper decided to spend the Labor Day holiday at a cabin near Dollywood, he had no idea he'd come home with a terrible souvenir.

A tiny red bump on his finger was the first sign something was wrong.

"I wake up and have a little red bump right beside my fingernail," the 16-year-old Blountville resident said. "And it starts swelling up, and it's getting bigger and bigger through the week."

Paul had been bitten by a spider or, perhaps, stung by a scorpion, a surprisingly common household pest in parts of East Tennessee. Even with antibiotics prescribed by his doctor, the finger didn't heal.

"Initially, it looked like a bug bite," said William Harper, Paul's dad. "I kind of thought it would resolve itself the way most bug bites do."

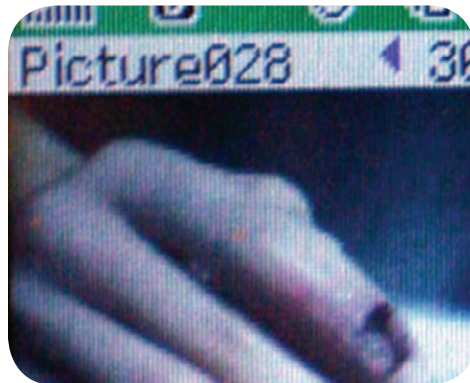
But the wound kept getting worse. Soon, his finger was so swollen and infected Paul couldn't bend it. It was then he went to the Bristol Regional Medical Center emergency department.

The staff there immediately referred the teen to Dr. Morgan Lorio, a fellowship-trained hand surgeon at the hospital's Hand Center. After examining Paul's hand, Dr. Lorio determined surgery was the only chance of saving the teenager's finger.

"We saw his hand, and I made a determination he needed to go to the operating room," Dr. Lorio said. "In layman's terms, his finger looked just as big as a sausage."



Healing continues to progress weeks after Paul Harper nearly lost his finger to an infection – most likely from being bitten by a spider or stung by a scorpion.



Using a cell phone, Paul snapped a grainy but revealing photo of the wound on his finger.

During surgery, Dr. Lorio removed the dead tissue from Paul's finger, leaving the bone and tendon exposed. To help the finger heal, Dr. Lorio completed a follow-up procedure in which he covered Paul's finger with an innovative material called Integra.

The Integra, used in place of a skin graft, has worked extremely well for Paul, Dr. Lorio said.

"We're seeing a nice contour restored

to his flesh," Dr. Lorio said. "We have no real defect left whatsoever – to the point he's being managed with a Band-Aid. I think his prognosis is going to be absolutely excellent. ... If he hadn't had a hand surgeon, he probably would have an amputation."

Since his surgery, Paul has completed weeks of therapy with the certified hand therapists at the Hand Center. He missed nearly a month of school during his recovery, but his life has begun returning to normal. He has regained significant use of his hand and expects to make a full recovery.

Helping patients like Paul overcome accident and injury is the mission of the Hand Center, said Kim Masker, an occupational therapist at Bristol Regional.

"If you lose a hand or even just lose a finger, that's a big disability," Masker said. "Just a small decrease in your grip strength can be very limiting to your daily activities."



Dr. Morgan Lorio is a fellowship-trained hand and spine surgeon with Neuro-Spine Solutions. He earned his medical degree at the Louisiana State University School of Medicine and completed fellowships at the Hand Center of Western New York and Simmons Orthopaedic and Spine.