

# SNAKE BITES

The purpose of this guide is to slow down or reduce the invasion of the venom (poison), to prevent worsening of victim's condition, to prepare the victim for later medical procedures so that complications may be minimized, and generally to get the victim to such treatment quickly and safely

## SELF MANAGEMENT



### WHAT TO **DO** IF BITTEN BY A VENOMOUS SNAKE

1. Allow bite to bleed freely for 15-30 seconds.
2. Remove any jewelry or tight fitting clothing.
3. Rapidly apply antiseptic cleanser to the entire area and place cold compress as closely as possible without interfering with suction process.
4. Cleanse and rapidly disinfect area with iodine or other disinfectant.
5. If bitten on hand, finger, foot or toe:
  - ❖ Wrap leg/arm rapidly with a bandage past the knee or elbow joint immobilizing it. Leave area of fang marks open.
  - ❖ Quickly tie a light, restricting band a few inches away from the puncture/bite marks. The bandage should not be too tight, loose enough for a finger to slip under it.
  - ❖ Without cutting, apply strong suction if a commercial bite kit suction device is available, preferably within seconds of the bite directly on the main or deepest puncture/bite marks.
6. If bitten on face, torso or buttocks:
  - ❖ Crepe bandaging cannot be applied to such bites.

- ❖ Shave hair area and apply strong suction then wrap with a pressure dressing made of a gauze pad soaked in iodine or other disinfectant.
7. If possible, try and keep bitten extremity at heart level or in a gravity-neutral position. Raising it above heart level can cause the poison to travel into the body. Holding it down, below heart level can increase swelling.
  8. **ONLY if you are very sure:** identify the species of the offending snake so that the doctors can decide on the most suitable antivenom to be used.
  9. Go to nearest hospital or medical facility as soon as possible. Inform the officer in charge about the snake species if identified.
- ☑ **DO NOT** remove pressure dressings or bandage until you are at a facility ready and able to administer antivenom. As soon as the dressings are released the venom will spread causing the usual expected problems of venomous snakebite. The hospital at this time must be prepared to administer the antivenom.
  - ☑ **DO NOT** eat or drink anything unless advised by medical personnel
  - ☑ **DO NOT engage** in *strenuous* physical activity
  - ☑ **DO NOT** apply *oral (mouth) suction* to bite. Use a suction device.
  - ☑ **DO NOT** cut into or incise bite marks with a blade
  - ☑ **DO NOT** use electrical shock.
  - ☑ **DO NOT** apply either hot or cold packs
  - ☑ **DO NOT** apply a narrow, constrictive tourniquet such as a belt, necktie or cord as these will cut off blood flow.
  - ☑ **DO NOT** waste time or take any risks trying to kill, bag or bring in offending snake

**Time is critical!** Any venom present will become destructive very quickly. So **stay calm** and follow through the instructions given above.

## IMPORTANT ADVICES

1. Never hike, camp, work or collect specimens in areas where there are venomous snakes *unless accompanied by at least two companions*. One to stay with the victim and the other to go get help. All parties should know what to do.
2. If you come across any snake in the field and don't know positively what it is or isn't, *do not approach* it, try and examine it or photograph it (unless you have a long telephoto or zoom lens). Move away from it as expediently as possible.
3. *Never handle* or attempt to handle venomous snakes without at least one trained companion present

### REFERENCES:

#### Websites:

- a) <http://www.xmission.com/~gastown/hepmed>
- b) <http://www.ambulance.qld.gov.au/first/snake.htm>
- c) [http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/995\\_snakes.html](http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/995_snakes.html)

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