



SNAKE SEASON IS HERE **What you need to know**

October to April is snakebite season, and as temperatures increase, snakes become more active. Snakebites can be serious and sometimes life-threatening and require swift and appropriate treatment. The majority of victims do, however, experience a full recovery without the administration of antivenom.

How to avoid getting bitten

- Leave snakes alone and treat them with respect at all times.
- Do not handle snakes, even small ones.
- Never tamper with a seemingly dead snake, as many have the nasty habit of playing dead when scared or threatened, only to strike out the moment an opportunity arises.
- Wear boots and thick trousers or jeans if you spend a great deal of time outdoors.
- Step onto logs and rocks and never over them. Snakes often sun themselves while partially concealed under a log or rock.
- Never put your hands in out-of-sight places, especially when mountain climbing. Berg Adders are known to bask on small ledges and will certainly bite if a hand suddenly appears close by.
- Never walk barefoot or without a torch at night when camping or visiting facilities in the bush. Many snakes are active after sunset, and slow-moving snakes like the Puff Adder are easily trodden on.
- Do not try to kill or catch a snake if you come across one. Do not attempt to pin it or grab it behind the head. Some snakes, such as the Stiletto Snake, cannot be held safely behind the head and you will certainly get bitten if you try.
- In case of a snakebite emergency, do not attempt to catch or kill the snake – rather take a photograph from a safe distance to assist with identification.





Snakebite Symptoms

Snakebite symptoms vary dramatically from bite to bite. Many snakebites take place so quickly that victims are not always certain that they have actually been bitten. A bite mark is seldom the characteristic two-fang mark – often a bite will be from a single fang and may just be a scratch with a little bleeding.

In the event of a snakebite, the victim may have some of the following symptoms:

- An immediate burning pain, followed by swelling, which progresses up to the limb and may affect the lymph glands (the Puff Adder and the Mozambique Spitting Cobra).
- Dizziness, difficulty swallowing and breathing, drooping eyelids and nausea (the mambas and the Cape Cobra).
- Bleeding from the nose, small cuts, followed by bleeding from the mucous membranes and, after several hours, and severe internal bleeding (the Boomslang and the Twig Snake).
- Shock, which can cause nausea, pain, and difficulty in breathing.

In the event of a snake bite, DO NOT:

- Cut and suck the wound. Snake venom very quickly attaches to local tissue and is absorbed into the lymphatic system and very little venom can be removed by suction. Cutting may expose the wound to secondary infection.
- Apply any electric shock therapy. Electric shocks do not neutralize snake venom.
- Apply a tourniquet. Arterial or venous tourniquets are not advised in most bites as venom is initially transported largely through the lymphatic system and not through veins. There is little evidence that a tourniquet could be life-saving following a snakebite.
- Apply ice or boiling water, lotion, or potions. Leave the bite site alone, except for cleaning it with cool water and applying a sterile gauze dressing. Boiling water does not denature snake venom. Do not give the victim alcohol.
- Inject antivenom as a first aid measure. If required, antivenom must be injected intravenously by a medical doctor in a hospital environment and usually in large quantities. Some patients have an allergic reaction to antivenom and this may result in anaphylaxis – a life-threatening condition if not treated promptly.



DON'T



First aid measures for snake bite:

- **Get the victim to a hospital** as soon as possible and in a safe manner. If you need an ambulance, call Europ Assist (0861 746 548).
- **Keep the victim calm** and as still as possible. Movement speeds up the spread of venom in the lymphatic system. Immobilize the victim, lay the victim down if possible and transport to the closest hospital. Call Europ Assist (0861 746 548) if you need an ambulance. Elevate the affected limb slightly above heart level.
- **Remove rings and tight clothing.** If bitten on the hand, foot, or lower leg, remove rings, bangles, bracelets, watches, anklets, and any other tight jewelry, as well as tight clothing and shoes.
- **Apply pressure bandages.** If you are more than an hour or two from the closest medical facility, consider applying pressure bandages to the affected limb, but only in suspected Black Mamba or Cape Cobra bites.
- **Call the Poison Information Centre help line** for further advice (0861 555 777).



IMPORTANT: Do not waste valuable time applying a pressure bandage - immediately transport the patient to the nearest hospital with a trauma unit and, if possible, apply the pressure bandage whilst travelling.

Source: African Snakebite Institute at www.africansnakebiteinstitute.com



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