

FIRST AID FOR SNAKE BITE

- Keep victim calm. Reassure – ‘not all snake bites are venomous. Not all venomous snakes are deadly. Even if venomous, may not have delivered the toxin into the victim. Even if envenomed, there are effective antivenoms available’. Keeping calm reduces the blood flow and the dissemination of the toxin within the circulation.
- Remove overlying clothing to prevent venom on the clothing entering through the bite wound. Wash the wound with soap and water. Apply betadine if available.
- Remove all rings, bracelets, watches, or jewellery from the bitten hand and shoes from the feet of the bitten leg.
- Apply a light constricting band one to two inches wide (NOT a tourniquet) two to four inches above the bite. The band should be snug, but not tight. It should be loose enough to slip one finger underneath the band and a pulse should be clearly felt below the band. **DO NOT** cut off the blood supply to the wound area. **DO NOT** apply a constricting band around a joint, head, neck, or around the trunk of the body.
- **DO NOT** cut into the wound - this will spread the venom and cause infection.
- **DO NOT** suck on the wound with your mouth - this will cause infection and little venom will actually be removed.
- **DO NOT** apply a tourniquet to the wound - this cuts off the blood supply to the wound.
- Immobilise the site of bite. If it's a limb splint it. Do not allow the victim to walk.
- Give 2 paracetamol tablets for pain relief. **DO NOT** give aspirin as this will thin out the blood and aggravate bleeding. Do not give sedatives or alcohol.
- Transport victim immediately to the hospital for evaluation and treatment.
- If the snake is killed take it along for identification. **Note:** live snakes can appear to be dead therefore **exert extreme caution** even if snake appears dead. However, do not waste time trying to capture or kill the snake. Nevertheless, a clear description of the snake would help in choosing the appropriate antivenin.

PREVENTING SNAKE BITES

- Always be aware of your surroundings.
- Walk in areas where the ground is clear so you can see where you step.
- Be aware of where you sit especially in shady areas.
- Wear protective clothing, such as long pants and hiking boots. This would minimise poisoning even if bitten.
- Wear gloves when using your hands to move bush or rocks.
- Don't reach into cracks in rocks, animal burrows or under bushes.
- Don't walk around at night or sleep on the ground because snakes are most active at night. Use a torch / light source when out at night. Use a long stick to probe the path in front of you when travelling at night. Stamp your feet hard when walking so that snakes would sense the vibration and move away.
- Don't tease or handle snakes. It could be dangerous.