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**SNAKE BITE**

Information: University of Maryland Medicine

**Considerations:**  
Each year, there are about 7,000 victims in the U.S.--mostly in the summer season.  
  
Poisonous snake bites are medical emergencies. It usually takes several hours for snake venom to kill. The right antivenom can save a victim's life.  
  
Snake bites can cause severe local tissue damage and often require follow-up care.  
  
**Causes:**  
Poisonous snake bites include bites by any of the following "pit viper" snakes

* rattlesnake
* copperhead
* water moccasin
* cottonmouth
* coral snake

**Symptoms:**

* bloody [wound](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/000043.htm) discharge
* [blurred vision](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003029.htm)
* burning
* [convulsions](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003200.htm)
* [diarrhea](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003126.htm)
* [dizziness](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003093.htm)
* [excessive sweating](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003218.htm)
* [fainting](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003092.htm)
* fang marks in the skin
* [fever](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003090.htm)
* [increased thirst](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003085.htm)
* localized tissue death
* [loss of muscle coordination](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003198.htm)
* [nausea and vomiting](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003117.htm)
* [numbness and tingling](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003206.htm)
* [rapid pulse](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003077.htm)
* severe localized pain
* skin discoloration
* [swelling](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003103.htm) at the site of the bite
* [weakness](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003174.htm)

**Do not:**

* DO NOT allow the victim to exercise. If necessary, carry the victim to safety.
* DO NOT apply a tourniquet.
* DO NOT apply cold compresses to a snake bite.
* DO NOT cut into a snake bite.
* DO NOT give the victim [stimulants](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/002308.htm) or [pain medications](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/002123.htm) unless instructed to do so by a doctor.
* DO NOT give the victim anything by mouth.
* DO NOT raise the site of the bite above the level of the victim's heart.
* DO NOT try to suction the venom--doing so may cause more harm than good.

**Call Your Healthcare Provider if:**

* someone has been bitten by a snake. Time is of the essence. If possible, call ahead to the emergency room so antivenom can be ready when the victim arrives.

**First Aid:**

1. Keep the victim calm, restrict movement, and keep the affected area below heart level to reduce the flow of venom.  
  
2. Wash the bite with soap and water.  
  
3. Remove any rings or constricting items; the affected area may swell.  
  
4. If the area of the bite begins to swell and change color, the snake was probably poisonous.  
  
5. Cover the bite with a clean, cool compress or a clean, moist dressing to reduce [swelling](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003103.htm) and discomfort.  
  
6. Monitor the [vital signs](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/002341.htm) (temperature, [pulse](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003399.htm) , rate of breathing, [blood pressure](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003398.htm) ) of the victim. If there are signs of [shock](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/000039.htm) (such as [paleness](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/article/003244.htm) ), lay the victim flat, raise the feet about a foot, and cover the victim with a blanket.  
  
7. Get medical help immediately.  
  
8. Bring in the dead snake if this can be done without risk of further injury.

**Prevention:**

* Even though most snakes are not poisonous, avoid picking up or playing with any snake unless you have been properly trained.
* When hiking in an area known to have snakes, wear long pants and boots if possible.
* Do not thrust hands or feet into any areas if you cannot see into the area.
* Tap ahead of you with walking stick before entering an area with an obscured view of your feet. Snakes will attempt to avoid you if given adequate warning.

[http://www.toolboxtopics.com/Contributed/Snake%201.jpg](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/images/fullsize/2305.jpg)  
[Venom from poisonous snakes can cause local tissue death (necrosis), bleeding and destruction of blood cells (hematological problems), and nerve (neurological) damage (including coma and paralysis). This snake bite has caused swelling and local tissue death on the finger.](http://umm.drkoop.com/conditions/ency/images/fullsize/2305.jpg)

Safety Recommendations:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Job Specific Topics:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Attended By:

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