

Snakebite



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Bite from a venomous snake, such as a rattlesnake, copperhead, water moccasin, or coral snake. Bites on the legs and feet are more common. Bites on the head and trunk are more dangerous. Snakes are more likely to bite runners, joggers, walkers, hikers, backpackers, fishers, boaters, and campers or anyone playing or working where snakes live.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- If the bite is from a coral snake, it will have multiple fang marks and small cuts; symptoms may not appear for 3 to 4 hours. If the bite is from another snake, it will have deep single or double fang marks, and symptoms will begin quickly.
- Severe pain and swelling around the bite.
- Skin color around the bite looks bruised.
- Bleeding spots under the skin, all over the body.
- Numbness and tingling around the mouth and in the hands and feet.
- Excessive sweating; fever.
- Low blood pressure and life-threatening shock.
- Breathing difficulty.
- Blurred vision; headache.
- Seizures; coma.

CAUSES

Snakes use their fangs to bite a person. Venomous snakes inject a venom through the fangs.

RISK INCREASES WITH

Bites from venomous snakes occur during outdoor activities in warm months in areas where snakes are known to live. People handling snakes or trying to capture snakes put themselves at risk.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wear protective shoes, boots and clothing for hiking, camping, fishing, and hunting. Consider taking a snakebite kit with instructions with you.
- Don't try to pick up or handle snakes.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable with rapid medical care. Skin tissue affected by the bite may take weeks to months to heal.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Wound infection and skin loss.
- Heart, lung, blood, or kidney complications.
- Compartment syndrome (loss of blood circulation to muscles in a closed body space).
- Reaction to the antivenin includes anaphylaxis (severe allergic) and delayed serum sickness.
- Death from snakebite is rare.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- If possible, identify the snake, but don't waste time looking for it.
- Don't panic! Venom will spread more quickly through the body if the victim runs or gets excited.
- Call 911 for emergency help. If help cannot get there right away, go to the nearest emergency center.
- Follow snakebite kit instructions if one is handy.
- Some basic first aid steps include: Remain calm. Keep bitten area below or at heart level, if possible. Remove jewelry and tight clothing. Do not cut or suction the bite. Cover area with a clean, dry pad. Do not use a tourniquet. If elastic bandage is available, wrap firmly around the area. Don't use ice on the area (cool compresses may be used). Cover victim with a blanket. Don't give victim food or drink, especially alcohol.
- In the hospital, the treatment may include:
 - Breathing support with a machine if needed.
 - Treatment to prevent any complications.
 - Surgical debridement (removal of dead or infected tissue) after 3 or 4 days. Skin grafts may be needed.

MEDICATIONS

- Your health care provider may prescribe:
 - Antivenin to counter the snake poison.
 - Tetanus booster injection.
 - Antibiotics to prevent infection.
 - Pain relievers. Narcotics cannot be used for coral snake bites. They may cause shock.

ACTIVITY

Resume normal activities as soon as symptoms improve.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

New, unexplained symptoms develop after snakebite treatment.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page