

SNAKE-BITE MANAGEMENT FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Snake-bite is one of the more serious health issues, especially in India where deaths due to snake-bites are estimated well over 46,000 every year. Even though actual envenomation takes place less often, it is best to stay prepared for an emergency.

Firstly, **Things NOT to Do:**

- Do not suck out venom
- Do not make incision to bleed out venom
- Do not go to traditional healers or anything similar
- Do not try out home remedies
- Do not apply tourniquets
- Do not apply ice
- Do not clean out the bitten part
- Do not try to catch/kill the snake

All of the above activities either **do not work** or are **extremely dangerous** to perform. In fact, they will do more harm than good.

Following is what you should do:

- Make sure the victim and others are at a safe distance away from the snake; do not attempt to capture the snake, get the victim and others away from the snake
- Try to memorize the snake's appearance (from a safe distance!)
- Remove watches / rings / other jewelry from the bitten part; swelling sets in rapidly after bite and any such objects can obstruct blood flow resulting in dangerous tissue damage
- Keep the victim calm and reassured, do not panic, as trivial as it may sound, it makes everything from the victim's ability to deal with the situation to your ability to make decisions better
- Try to immobilize the bitten limb; do not make the victim run and avoid making him/her walk if possible
- Do not waste any time and arrange for a quick transport to the nearest hospital treating snake-bite cases, as safely and comfortably as possible
- If possible, note the time of bite and progression of symptoms
- Describe the snake and the whole incident to the attending doctor

Anti Snake Venom Serum is the only cure

If your neighborhood has high density of snakes, it is advisable to prepare a snake-bite protocol (plan of action in case of an emergency) best suited to you. This can simply be important contact people and numbers who should be informed first, name / address of nearest hospital treating snake-bites, best mode of transport and related details, name / contact no. of doctor, etc. Make sure all family members and friends understand their role in an emergency.



Spectacled cobra



Common krait



Russell's viper



Saw-scaled viper

The above 4 species account for most snake-bite deaths in India. Please be extra careful if you are around these.

In case of a snake-bite, call **108** from your phone. The emergency response service will immediately dispatch an ambulance with trained paramedics.

Prevention is always better than cure:

- Education: Know your local snakes, know the sort of places where they like to live and hide, at what times of year, at what times of day/night or in what kinds of weather they are most likely to be active.
- Be especially vigilant about snake bites after rains, during flooding, at harvest time and at night.
- Try to wear proper shoes or boots and long trousers, especially when walking in the dark or in undergrowth. Always check footwear before wearing them!
- Use torch / lamp when walking at night.
- Avoid snakes as far as possible, including snakes performing for snake charmers. Never handle, threaten or attack a snake and never intentionally trap or corner a snake in an enclosed space.

In the house:

- Do not keep livestock, especially chickens, in the house, as snakes may come to hunt them. Store food in rat-proof containers. Regularly check houses for snakes and, if possible, avoid those types of house construction that will provide snakes with hiding.
- If at all possible, try to avoid sleeping on the ground. If you have to sleep on the ground use mosquito net that is well tucked in under the mattress or sleeping mat.

In the yard:

- Try not to provide hiding places for snakes. Clear termite mounds, heaps of rubbish, building materials etc. from near the house.
- Do not have tree branches touching the house. Keep grass short or clear the ground around your house and clear low bushes in the vicinity so that snakes cannot hide close to the house.
- Keep your granary away from the house, it may attract rodents that snakes will hunt.
- Take great care when clearing vegetation, raking dry leaves in outdoors.
- Use a light (torch or lamp) when you walk outside the house or visit the latrine at night.

In the rural areas:

- Firewood collection at night is a real danger. Avoid doing.
- Watch where you walk especially when walking in the dark or in undergrowth. Do not go barefoot.
- Step on to rocks or logs rather than straight over them – snakes may be sunning themselves on the sides.
- Avoid handling dead snakes, or snakes that appear to be dead. They can still inject venom!
- Keep young children away from areas known to be snake-infested.
- Many snake-bites occur during ploughing, planting and harvesting and in the rainy season.
- If you see a snake, do nothing; let it go. Do not try to pick it up or kill it. Snakes prefer not to confront large animals such as humans so give them the chance to slither away.