

Snake Safety

Snake Encounter

If you encounter a snake, you may be shocked, don't panic! Try to remain calm.

- **Immediately halt.** Remain still because snakes react to movement.
- DO NOT make any sudden movements.
- If the snake is more than a few metres away, move very slowly away while watching carefully to see if the snake reacts. If the snake begins to look agitated, remain still until it moves away from you.
- If the snake is close then remain still until the snake moves away from you.

Beware: Running may induce the snake to follow. They can be as fast as 12km/hr!

References: Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Snake Bites

In Australia, there are about 3000 snake bites per year. Many cases of snake bite occur when people try to handle, catch or kill a snake. Snakes can be active any time of day, even later in the evening, so be extra vigilant.

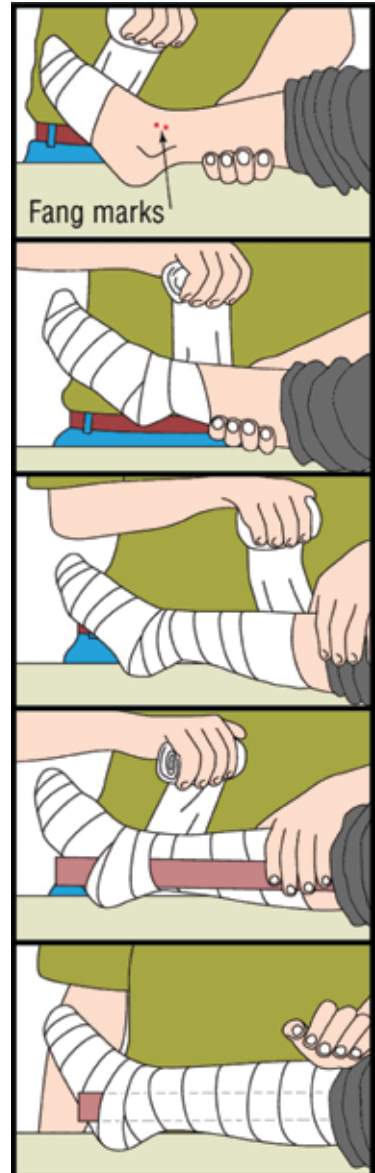
- DO NOT attempt to catch or kill snakes.
- DO NOT provoke or corner a snake.

First Aid

Snake bites can be life threatening. **Immediately seek medical treatment.** The bite site may be painless.

Symptoms may include:

- **Within 1hr:** Headache (an important symptom), irritability, sensitivity to light, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, confusion; coagulation abnormalities; occasionally sudden hypotension with loss of consciousness.
- **1-3 hrs:** Cranial nerve paralysis (ptosis, diplopia, dysphagia etc), abdominal pain, haemoglobinuria, hypertension, tachycardia, haemorrhage.
- **Beyond 3hrs:** Limb and respiratory muscle paralysis leading to respiratory



failure, peripheral circulatory failure with pallor and cyanosis, myoglobinuria, eventually death.

“**Pressure-Immobilization First Aid**” is recommended by Queensland Health. Its purpose is to slow the movement of venom from the bite site into the circulation, thus “buying time” to reach medical care. Research has shown that very little venom reaches the blood stream if firm pressure is applied over the bitten area and the limb is immobilized. Keep some Compression Bandages in your First Aid kit. Advise all family members how to correctly use the bandages.

Pressure Immobilization First Aid

Bandages and splint, when correctly applied, should be comfortable for hours. **IMPORTANT:**

- Stay calm. Try to remain still. Seek assistance. Call 000 for an ambulance.
- DO NOT wash or touch the wound. Traces of venom may help identify the snake.
- Only the doctor should remove the bandages.

Bites to the lower limb

- Apply a broad compression bandage over the bite site as soon as possible. Crepe bandages are ideal, but any flexible material may be used. Clothing, towels, etc. may be torn into strips. Panty hose have also been successfully used.
- DO NOT take off clothing as the movement can promote movement of venom into the bloodstream. Keep still.
- Bandage upwards from the lower portion of the bitten limb. Bandage as tightly as you would apply to a sprained ankle. Bandage as high as possible on the limb.
- Apply a splint to the leg. Any rigid object may be used. Bind it as firmly to as much of the leg as possible.

Bites to the hand or forearm

- Bandage as much of the arm as possible, starting at the fingers.
- Use a splint to the elbow.
- Use a sling to immobilize the arm.

Bites to the trunk

- Restrict chest movement and keep still until the ambulance arrives.

Bites to the head or neck

- Keep still until the ambulance arrives.

References: Queensland Department of Health. Images © Commonwealth Serum Laboratories. Dr. Struan K. Sutherland, Sydney University.