



DOs and DONTs when you encounter snakes at a work site

DOs and DONTs when confronted by a snake:

With the exception of the Puff Adder, a snake will not strike unless it is provoked, disturbed unexpectedly or feels threatened.

- ✓ If you do encounter a snake and it has not noticed you, it is best to just walk around it at a distance.
- ✓ Do not try to catch it or kill it.
- ✓ If it is already moving, stand still and wait for it to move off.
- ✓ If the snake has reared its head and looks to you as if it is ready to strike, you should freeze on the spot. Move off slowly when it safe to do so.

DOs and DONTs in the event of being bitten by a snake (basic first aid):

Venom of poisonous snakes is either neurotoxin (affects the nervous system), hemotoxic (affects the blood clotting mechanisms and circulatory system) or cytotoxic (cell-destroying). It often has at least two of these properties. Thus, it is imperative to get the casualty to professional medical help as soon as possible after being bitten. In the event of someone being bitten by a snake the following should be done:

- ✓ Ensure that the casualty is breathing and there is blood circulation
- ✓ Calm the casualty down and reassure them that they will be fine
- ✓ Do not try and kill the snake responsible. A second bite would really complicate matters.
- ✓ If possible, wash the bitten area thoroughly with water
- ✓ Do not apply a tourniquet. Immediately apply a broad pressure bandage over the bite and, if possible, over the entire limb.
- ✓ Do not inject antivenom indiscriminately. This should be left for a doctor.
- ✓ Remove the victim's shoes but do not waste time removing clothes.
- ✓ Do not give the victim alcohol or any other liquid.
- ✓ If swelling has not developed, apply a pressure pad where the bite marks are, ensuring that pressure is applied evenly and firmly
- ✓ If there is already swelling, do not apply a pressure pad
- ✓ Immobilise the bitten limb and keep it lower than heart level,
- ✓ If it is an arm or hand that has been bitten, immobilise by placing it in a sling
- ✓ In the case of a part of the leg being bitten, the leg should be placed on a splint
- ✓ Get the casualty to hospital as quickly as possible
- ✓ Monitor the vital signs (breathing and pulse),
- ✓ Give artificial respiration if the casualty stops breathing.

Some additional things to do:

- ✓ Make a note of the time the bite occurred. This will help physicians to check on the progress of the venom.

- ✓ Remove constricting jewellery. Rapid swelling may make such items as rings and bracelets into objects of great pain.
- ✓ If possible phone ahead and clearly explain to the hospital that a possible snakebite case is on the way. If a positive identification of the snake can be made, make sure they know what to expect.
- ✓ Be prepared to render artificial respiration in the case of a cobra bite. A dangerous sign of impending lung paralysis is when the victim cannot blow out a match held at arm's length. The venom does not kill - the inability to breathe is what causes death.
- ✓ Be prepared to keep the airways open and make sure the patient does not drown on his own saliva.
- ✓ Keep the patient as immobile as possible and transport to a hospital. In the case of a Cape Cobra - you want to get there as fast as possible whilst in the case of the other dangerous snakes of the Peninsula; you have time to drive carefully to the nearest major medical facility. Ensure that a tetanus shot is administered whether the snake was venomous or not.
- ✓ Keep in mind that shock is probably present in all snakebite cases, whether from venomous or non-venomous species. Shock can kill even more rapidly than snake venom. Acquaint yourself with the symptoms of shock. Be prepared to deal with shock symptoms in ANY snakebite victim. Even those bitten by non-venomous species. People have died of such bites in the past.

First Aid treatment for spitting snakes

On skin the venom does no harm unless it enters an open wound. In one's eyes, however, it is absorbed rapidly by tiny blood vessels close to the surface and causes severe burning and inflammation. Rubbing the eyes does further harm.

- ✓ Rinse the eyes immediately with large quantities of water or any other harmless fluid such as milk or even beer.
- ✓ Wipe any excess venom from the face.
- ✓ Seek medical advice. It may be necessary for a doctor to rinse the eyes with diluted antivenom (one part serum to nine parts water).
- ✓ The victim's eyes should recover fully within three or four days. It is a fallacy that milk specifically must be used to neutralise snake venom in a person's eyes.

***REMEMBER, FEW PEOPLE DIE FROM SNAKE BITE.
KEEP THE VICTIM CALM AND REASSURED.
OBTAIN EXPERT ASSISTANCE WITHOUT DELAY.***