

How To Prevent Snakebite

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." This saying reflects the idea that it is better to avoid a snakebite than to treat one. Here are some ways to avoid being bitten:

1) When outdoors in an area where snakes are suspected, be careful where hands and feet are placed. Do not stick hands in holes or under logs, lumber, firewood, scrap metal, overturned boats or trash. Use a hoe or shovel instead of hands and feet to move or turn over logs, scrap metal, etc. Do not step over logs (much less sit on one!) unless you've first check out what's on the other side of it.

2) Do not lay down or sit in areas of tall grass and thick vegetation. High top heavy boots and long pants are recommended when walking through tall grass areas. When walking in wooded areas stay on the "trails" if possible.

3) Camp away from areas such as stream banks, brush piles, tall vegetation, swamps and trash piles. Do not collect wood for campfires at dusk or evening when it is too dark to see clearly. Commercial snake "repellants" and ropes do not keep snakes out of a tent. Sleeping on a cot instead of the ground may be useful in keeping a crawling snake out of your sleeping bag.

4) Approaching the bank of a swamp, pond or bayou, be sure to look out for snakes near the water's edge in water hyacinths, Louisiana Iris, or other vegetation before picking these flowers.

5) To keep the number of snakes low around homes and weekend camps, keep the grass mowed and brush to a minimum. Appliances, old lumber and other trash provide good hiding places for snakes and should be removed. Grain and seed attract mice and rats, favorite snake prey, and should be kept in rodent proof containers and far away from your home or camp.

6) Do realize that a few small, harmless snakes will set up housekeeping even in well tended backyard flower gardens, living under leaf litter and within clumps of monkey grass. Fortunately, they are harmless and good at eating garden pests such as spiders, insects, slugs and snails. They do not need to be killed.

7) Leave live snakes alone. Do not attempt to catch or move them. In particular, leave "dead" venomous snakes alone. Due to nerve reflexes, "dead" snakes can bite for up to an hour after being killed.

8) Certain individuals in Louisiana make house calls to remove snakes, charging a fee. A nation-wide group will alert local personnel to deal with snake problems and can be reached at 1-800-339-9470.

9) For more information on snakes in your area, contact Jeff Boundy, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Herpetologist, in Baton Rouge at 225-765-2815.

What to do for snakebite

1) Stay calm; a snakebite is rarely fatal. The victim should stay as still and as quiet as possible, avoiding any unnecessary exertion. Do not drink any alcoholic beverages or keep ice on the wound. It is best for the victim not to attempt the drive to the emergency room himself, calling a friend or ambulance instead.

2) Seek medical attention promptly. If the snake can be safely killed (without resulting in another bite) it is best to do so and bring it in for identification purposes. Inform the hospital personnel if the victim has any known allergies or reaction to bee stings or other insects.

3) Keep the bitten body part immobilized (if the bite is on a limb). If the bite is on a finger or toe be sure to remove any rings. Apply a constricting band between the bite and the heart. This will slow down the spread of venom. Almost any type of makeshift band will do. This constricting band should be loose enough to fit a finger under it but not too tight to cut off circulation. If medical help is more than 20 minutes away, be sure to check the band every 10 minutes and loosen if necessary. This method works best on pit viper bites.

If the bite is less than 10 minutes old and medical attention is more than 20 minutes away, one or two small incisions may be made just above the bite (in the direction of the trunk). Multiple incisions are not recommended. These should be no more than 3/8 inches long and 1/8 inches deep. The fluid may be sucked from the bite incision area during the next 30 minutes. This technique is not for the squeamish and should never be attempted if open sores are present on or in the mouth. If the bite is over 15 minutes old this incision technique is of no value and should not be attempted.

4) In the event of respiratory failure, CPR is imperative!! If the victim develops shock on the way to the hospital, he should lie down with his head lower than his feet.