

The Flying Doctor Snakebite Safety Guide

Every year there are around 3,000 reported snakebites in Australia.

What to do if a snake bites you

You won't always see the snake that bites you, in fact you might not even realise that you've been bitten. **Get help.**

Snakebites Do's and Don'ts

If a snake bites:

✗ Don't

Do not wash the wound or try to suck out the poison. Traces of venom in the bite can be used to identify which snake bit you

Don't waste time looking for the snake – venom identification is quicker, safer and more accurate

Do not apply a high tourniquet – this is extremely dangerous and could result in death when the tourniquet is removed

✓ Do

Apply a firm bandage and splint to immobilise and stop the venom spreading

Stay put – the patient should move as little as possible, by moving you will speed up the spread of the venom. Either put the patient on stretcher or bring transport to them

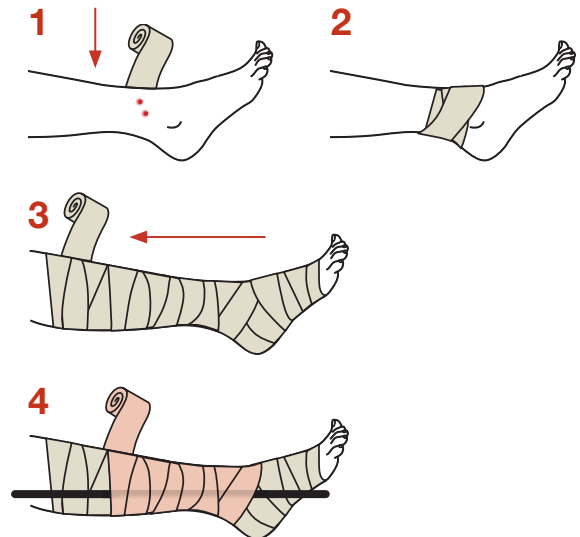
Seek urgent medical help, venom can cause severe damage and even death within hours



What you should do.

Don't panic. Keep calm and follow these steps.

1. **Call 000** – the faster that you can get professional help the better.
2. **Secure the wound** – if you have a first aid kit apply a pressure bandage and splint. Use a stick as a splint.



* If at any point the patient loses consciousness start CPR immediately.

ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The not-for-profit service provides **24-hour** emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft and road vehicles. In the past year, the South Eastern Section had around 51,000 patient contacts and transported over 8,300 patients.



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Every year there are around 3,000 reported snakebites in Australia.

The most dangerous snakes in Australia that you need to know are:



Eastern brown snake
(*Pseudonaja textilis*)



Western brown snake
(*Pseudonaja mengdeni*)



Mainland tiger snake
(*Notechis scutatus*)

Source: www.australiangeographic.com.au

Symptoms of a snakebite:

PUNCTURE WOUND

SWELLING AND REDNESS AROUND THE WOUNDS

PAIN AT THE BITE SITE

DIFFICULTY BREATHING

VOMITING AND NAUSEA

BLURRED VISION

SWEATING AND SALIVATING

NUMBNESS

IF NO SYMPTOMS, GET HELP TO BE SAFE

The Australian Snakebite Project - Top Tips

Men are much more likely to be bitten by a snake.

3/4 of snakebites are **men in their 30's**.



Snakebites happen in urban areas.



You are more likely to be bitten **close to home** rather than in the bush.

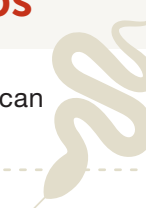
Lookout for snakes on your property.



Going for a **walk** and **gardening** are the most common activities when bites occurred.

Brown snakes can be aggressive.

41% of the recorded bites are from the **brown snake**.



Check arms and legs for puncture wounds.

Over **90%** of snakebites were found to occur on the **upper and lower limbs**.



For more information visit www.flyingdoctor.org.au/nswact

Treatment for snakebite.

Australian snake bite stats; 3000 bites are reported annually resulting in 300-500 hospitalisations and 2-3 deaths annually. Average time to death is 12 hours.

There are five genus of snakes that will cause serious harm; Browns, Blacks, Adders, Tigers and Taipans.

All snake venom is made up of huge proteins (like egg white). When bitten, a snake injects some venom into the meat of your limb (NOT into your blood).

This venom proteins cannot be absorbed into the blood stream from the bite site, it travels in the lymphatic system. Lymph fluid is moved differently to blood. Your heart pumps blood around, so even when you are lying still, your blood still circulates around the body. Lymph fluid only moves with physical muscle movement like bending your arm, wriggling fingers, walking/exercise etc.

Lymph fluid becomes blood after these lymph vessels converge to form one of two large vessels (lymphatic trunks) which are connected to veins at the base of the neck.

When bitten, the venom is been injected into this lymph fluid (which makes up the bulk of the water in your tissues). The only way that the venom can get into your blood stream is to be moved from the bite site in the lymphatic vessels to the lymphatic trunks. The only way to do this is to physically move the limbs that were bitten.

Stay still! Venom can't move if the victim doesn't move.

Remember people are not bitten into their blood stream.

In the 1980s a technique called Pressure immobilisation bandaging was developed to further retard venom movement. It completely stops venom /lymph transport toward the blood stream. A firm roll bandage is applied directly over the bite site (don't wash the area).

Technique:

Three steps: keep them still

Step 1. Apply a bandage over the bite site, to an area about 10cm above and below the bite.

Step 2: Then using another elastic roller bandage, apply a firm wrap from Fingers/toes all the way to the armpit/groin. The bandage needs to be firm, but not so

tight that it causes fingers or toes to turn purple or white. About the tension of a sprain bandage.

Step 3: Splint the limb so the patient can't walk or bend the limb.

Do nots:

Do not cut, incise or suck the venom.

Do not EVER use a tourniquet

Don't remove clothing - just bandage over the top. Any movement (like taking off shirt or pants) causes movement of the lymph fluid.

DO NOT try to catch or identify the snake. Hospitals no longer need that information. Years ago, tests would be done to identify the snake in order to give the correct antivenom. The new polyvalent antivenom neutralises the venoms of all the 5 listed snake genera, so it doesn't matter what snake bit the patient.

Australian snakes tend to have these main effects.

- Bleeding - internally and bruising.
- Muscles paralysed causing difficulty talking, moving & breathing.
- Pain
- In some snakes, severe muscle pain in the limb, and days later the bite site can break down forming a nasty wound.

Final tips: not all bitten people are envenomated and only those starting to show symptoms above are given antivenom.

NB: In some Victorian and Tasmanian hospitals where Tiger snake and Brown snake bites are the most common a combination of Tiger Snake Antivenom and Brown Snake Antivenom are sometimes given.