

Snakebites



Snakebites are often from nonpoisonous snakes and are often harmless. But a few can be deadly. Even nonpoisonous bites may sometimes get infected or cause an allergic reaction. That's why getting treatment right away is vital.

When to go to the emergency room (ER)

Call 911 right away for any snakebite. While you wait, these measures can help:

- Stay calm.
- Remove rings, watches, and any tight clothing.
- Keep the bitten body part at the same level or lower than the heart. This will keep the venom from spreading.
- Keep the bitten body part as still as possible.
- Be alert for symptoms of poisoning, such as skin turning a purple color, swelling, and severe pain near the bite.

What to expect in the ER

Treatment depends on the type of bite and how severe it is. Luckily, even bites from poisonous snakes may not inject poison into your body and are referred to as dry bites.

- Your injury will be cleaned and inspected for tissue damage at the bite site.
- Describe what you remember about the snake that bit you. This can help the healthcare providers figure out what type of snake it was, and if it was poisonous. Give any details about the shape of the eyes (round or elliptical) and head (round or triangular), as well as any distinguishing markings, such as stripes or rattles. Also tell providers when the bite occurred and what first aid treatment you received.
- You may have blood tests.
- You may be given antivenom (antivenin). This is very rare. This substance reverses the effects of a snake's poison. Antivenom can cause allergic reactions. So you may have a skin test first.
- You may be given a tetanus shot if you haven't had one in the last 5 years.
- You may be admitted to the hospital.

What not to do when bitten

If you or someone you know is bitten by a snake:

- Don't cut into the bite with a knife or razor.
- Don't try to suck out the venom by mouth.
- Don't put ice or a cold compress on the bite.
- Don't apply a tight bandage (tourniquet).
- Don't pick up or try to trap the snake.

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