

MESA PRIETA PETROGLYPH PROJECT

SNAKE BITE PREVENTION

- Many serious snakebites occur when someone deliberately provokes a snake, poisonous or not.
- When hiking in an area known to have snakes, wear long pants and boots if possible.
- Avoid areas where snakes may be hiding -- under rocks, boulders falls, logs, dense grass or brush, etc.
- Tap ahead of you with a walking stick before entering an area with an obscured view of your feet. Snakes will attempt to avoid you if given adequate warning.
- If you see a snake, back away from it slowly and do not touch it.

TREATMENT FOR SNAKE BITE IN THE FIELD

1. Prevent a second bite or a second victim. Snakes can continue to bite and inject venom with successive bites until they run out of venom.
2. Identify or be able to describe the snake, but only if it can be done without significant risk for a second bite or a second victim.
3. Unless the snake has positively been identified as harmless (non-venomous), safely and rapidly transport the victim to an emergency medical facility. Remember, misidentification could be fatal. A bite without initial symptoms can still be dangerous or even fatal.
4. Provide emergency medical care within the limits of your training.
 - Calm the victim
 - Remove constricting items on the victim such as rings or other jewelry that could cut off blood flow if the bite area swells
 - If the attending person is competent in the use of a tourniquet, one may be applied to the extremity 2-4 inches above the bite. The band should be loose enough that two fingers may easily slide underneath the band.
 - DO NOT apply ice or cooling to the snake bite area.
 - If the victim is in a remote area in which transport to an emergency medical facility will be prolonged, the limb should be immobilized and held below heart level. A splint may be applied however assure the wound does not swell enough to make the splint a tourniquet, cutting off blood flow. Check frequently to make sure toes and fingers remain pink and warm, that the limb is not becoming numb and that pain is not increasing.
 - Assist the victim to walk slowly to a point where transfer to a medical facility can be achieved.
 - While applying mechanical suction such as a Sawyer Extractor has been recommended by many authorities in the past, it is highly unlikely that it will remove any significant amount of venom and it is possible that suction could actually increase local tissue damage. Cutting and sucking the bite is no longer recommended. Neither action has been proven to result in venom removal and could increase the risk of infection.
 - Keep the extremity at heart level or lower. In most cases severe complications DO NOT occur until several hours post-bite. If the victim must be transported or walked out, keep the affected limb below the heart and limit use and movement.

- Seek medical help as soon as possible. Children and adults less than 120 lbs. are particularly at risk, as is anyone who has received multiple bites or a full load of venom.
 - Avoid alcohol, which increases metabolism and impairs judgment.
 - Remember that most bites, even from poisonous snakes, are not fatal. Panic can increase the danger to the victim by inducing a rapid heartbeat.
 - Monitor the person's vital signs -- temperature, pulse, rate of breathing, and blood pressure if possible. If there are signs of shock (such as paleness, rapid heart beat and cold, clammy skin), lay the victim flat, raise the feet about a foot, and cover the victim with a blanket.
 - Cover the bite with a clean, dry dressing. The wound will require regular cleaning and observation to avoid infection, whether or not the snake was poisonous.
5. The victim should get to an emergency care facility as quickly as possible because antivenim (medicine to counteract the poisonous effects of the snake's venom) could be life saving. The victim should receive a tetanus booster if he or she has not had one in the last five years.
 6. The affected limb should be used as little as possible to delay absorption of the venom.