

MAFES Dawg Tracks



April 27, 2009



Safety Tips: Snake Protection



Spring is here; therefore, the snakes will be out in force. I have always heard that if you leave them alone, they won't hurt you. My contention has always been that maybe they won't, but my fear of them might make me hurt myself.

Statistics show that of approximately 7,000 snakebites each year in the U.S., there are fewer than 15 deaths. According to the snake gurus, they aren't normally aggressive, and given the chance, they will avoid contact with man. All snakes in Mississippi have the ability to bite but do not always release venom. Approximately 35 - 40 percent of the bites reported each year result in little or no envenomation. Most cases of envenomation are related to the victim's attempting to kill or catch the snake.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS ENVENOMATION -

- Fang marks
- Intense local pain
- Rapid swelling
- Discoloration
- Oozing of blood from the fang marks

If fang marks are present, but there is little or no pain, no swelling or discoloration and the bite is dry, envenomation is probably minimal.

Many snakebite victims are discharged from the hospital within 24 hours and recover with no long-term effects. Despite this fact, you should always seek medical attention of a snakebite injury.

TIPS FOR PROTECTION -

We are told that the risk of a poisonous snakebite is less than being struck by lightning. We can further reduce this possibility by:

- Cleaning up idle refuse and other types of hiding spots around buildings and property.
- Wear boots and long pants in wooded areas.
- Watch carefully and walk softly in areas where snakes are prone to be resting or nesting.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POISONOUS SNAKES -

Most poisonous snakes in the U.S. are in the pit viper group. They can be identified by:

- ~Pits on the head
- ~Vertical pupils
- ~A triangular head
- ~slim neck
- ~A heavy body with a single row of scales on the underside of its tail.

The pit vipers include groups of the major categories of copperhead and cottonmouth and two major categories of rattlesnakes.

All the pit vipers may vibrate their tails rapidly to make noise when threatened. Cottonmouths and copperheads are often referred to as moccasins, but they are two distinct categories within the pit viper group.

FACTS & PRECAUTIONS -

- Very few snakes are aggressive. If they are swimming toward you, they are probably more curious than aggressive.
- Snakes can only strike within 2/3rds of the length of their body. (A 3 foot snake could only reach up to 2 feet).
- If bitten by a snake, one should look at the characteristics to determine the type of snake that it is. Venomous snakes will leave 2 distinct puncture wounds. Non-venomous snakes may leave marks that resemble a scratch mark.
- Smaller snakes are harder to identify than larger ones and usually inject more venom than adults.
- Victims bitten by a venomous snake should get to a hospital as quickly as possible. If this isn't possible, wrap a constricting band between the bite and the heart to slow it down, but not to stop the blood flow. **Do not apply a tight tourniquet.** The best bet is to get to a hospital quickly.

FIRST AID TIPS -

- If the victim isn't breathing or can't be aroused, call 911.
- Calm and reassure the victim.
- If the snake is still in the area, don't attempt to kill it or catch it unless it poses a threat to the victim or yourself. Try to remember the identity of the snake so that you can help identify it from pictures in the hospital.
- Remove any items on the body that might cause restrictions in circulation.
- Immobilize the area as much as possible and try to keep the bite at or slightly below the level of the heart.
- Wash the area thoroughly, but do not scrub hard as this can cause absorption.
- Try to keep the victim from moving about rapidly while evacuating them to transportation.
- Do not give the victim anything to eat or drink, particularly alcohol.
- Do not make any cuts or apply suction to the area.
- Do not use ice on the affected area.
- Do not attempt to give an anti-venom vaccine.
- Do not administer pain or anti-anxiety medications.

**THE PRICE OF ACCIDENTS
ARE ALWAYS HIGH!**

* * * * *

~BE ALERT - ACCIDENTS HURT~