



## Emergency Snakebite Action Plan<sup>1</sup>

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Steve A. Johnson and Martin B. Main<sup>2</sup>

In the unfortunate event that a child is bitten at school by a venomous snake, teachers and administrators should be prepared. We encourage schools to develop a plan of action and immediately initiate the plan if necessary.

As soon as a bite from a snake is suspected or confirmed, a teacher or administrator should:

1. Call 911 and request that an ambulance be dispatched to the school.
2. Call the Poison Control Center's National Hotline at 1-800-222-1222.

The call will be directed to the Poison Control Center nearest to the area code from which the call was placed. Staff at these centers are trained to give guidance on what steps need to be taken prior to the arrival of the ambulance.

3. Provide the Poison Control Center with the name and phone number of the emergency room (ER) where the victim is being transported and request that the center have a toxicologist contact the ER.

The toxicologist with the Poison Control Center is trained on how to treat victims of venomous snakebites and will consult with the doctor at the ER to ensure the victim receives the best care possible.

4. Contact the parents or other designated emergency contact person.

On-site care for the victim includes several do's and don'ts that should be followed:

### **DO!**

- Get the victim away from the snake.
- Wash the area of the bite with soap and water.
- Keep the victim warm, as comfortable as possible, and offer reassurance.
- Immobilize the bite area if on an extremity and keep it lower than the victim's heart.
- Remove rings, bracelets, watches, or restrictive clothing on the extremity with the bite.

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1. This document is WEC 200, one portion of a 4-part package entitled "*Dealing with Venomous Snakes in Florida School Yards.*" Accompanying documents are available by contacting Dr. Steve A. Johnson ([johnsons@wec.ufl.edu](mailto:johnsons@wec.ufl.edu)) or Dr. Martin B. Main ([mbma@mail.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:mbma@mail.ifas.ufl.edu)). A free PowerPoint presentation (with speaking notes) about venomous snakes in Florida is available upon request from Dr. Johnson.

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- Keep a record of the time of the bite and the victim's symptoms. This will help the doctor and Poison Control Center toxicologist determine the severity of the bite and appropriate treatment.
- Keep track of the victim's symptoms and any first aid measures administered since the bite. Be sure to give this information as well as the time of the bite to emergency medical personnel.
- Be aware of any allergies (drug, food, animal) or existing medical conditions the victim may have. Snake antivenom, which may be administered at the hospital to counteract the effects of the venom, is produced with the aid of horses and sheep so it is important to know if the victim has any allergies to these animals.
- Get a positive identification of the snake if possible. However, do not delay seeking immediate medical attention or risk further injury to the victim or others in an attempt to identify the snake.

**DO NOT!**

- Do not apply a tourniquet to a bitten extremity. This can completely cut off blood flow and result in loss of the affected limb.
- Do not apply ice or attempt to cool the bite area.
- Do not make incisions at the bite marks and/or apply suction. This can cause further injury.
- Do not apply electric shock.
- Do not give any stimulants or alcohol to the victim.
- Do not wait to seek medical attention until symptoms develop.