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What Can I Do If Someone Is Bitten By A Venomous Snake?

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A weekly question/answer column

**What Can I Do If Someone Is Bitten By A
Venomous Snake?**

Terry Messmer answers:*

Utah is home to thirty-one species of snakes. Of these seven are venomous. While non-venomous snake bites are harmless, all venomous snake bites should be considered life-threatening. If a person is bitten by a venomous snake the wound will almost instantly show signs of swelling and discoloration of the surrounding tissue. A tingling sensation and nausea usually accompanies these symptoms. When someone has been bitten, time is of essence. If possible, call ahead to the emergency room so anti-venom can be ready when the victim arrives. Do the following:

- Keep the victim calm, restrict movement and keep the affected area below heart level to reduce the flow of venom.
- Wash the bite area with soap and water.
- Remove any rings or constricting items; the affected area will swell.
- Cover the bite with a clean, moist dressing to reduce swelling and discomfort.
- Monitor vital signs (pulse, temperature, breathing, blood pressure) of the victim. If there are signs of shock, lay the victim flat and cover with a warm blanket.
- Get help immediately.
- Bring in the dead snake if this can be done without further risk of injury

Here are some things you SHOULD NOT do:

- DO NOT allow the person to engage in physical activity such as walking or running. Carry the victim if he or she needs to be moved.
- DO NOT apply a tourniquet to the area above the wound.
- DO NOT apply a cold compress to the bite area.
- DO NOT cut into the bite.
- DO NOT give the victim stimulants or pain medications unless instructed by a medical physician.
- DO NOT give the victim anything my mouth.
- DO NOT raise the bite area above the level of the victim's heart.
- DO NOT try to suction the venom—doing so may cause more harm than good.

* Terry Messmer is Utah State University Extension Wildlife Specialist