

Emergency Snakebite Action Plan¹

Steve A. Johnson and Martin B. Main²

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, which will direct the call to the Poison Control Center nearest to you. The highly trained staff will give guidance on what steps need to be taken prior to the arrival of the ambulance. Provide the Poison Control Center with the name and phone number of the emergency room (ER) where the victim is being taken and request that the center have a toxicologist contact the ER. The Poison Control Center's toxicologists are trained on treatment of venomous snakebites and will consult with the ER doctor to ensure the victim receives the best care possible.

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



Figure 1. It is important to get a snakebite victim away from the snake as quickly as possible. It is not necessary to identify the snake -- trying to catch or kill the snake will likely result in someone else being bitten. Credits: Steve A. Johnson, U.S. Geological Survey

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1. This document is WEC 200, one portion of a 4-part package of the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation entitled "Dealing with Venomous Snakes in Florida School Yards." Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), University of Florida. First published: September 2005, updated March 2009. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>. A CD/DVD set that includes PowerPoint presentations (with speaking notes) and other information on venomous snake safety is available from the IFAS Extension Bookstore (<http://www.ifasbooks.ufl.edu>). For additional information, visit Dr. Johnson's website at <http://ufwildlife.ifas.ufl.edu>.
 2. Steve A. Johnson, assistant professor and extension specialist, Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, University of Florida's Plant City Teaching Center, Plant City, FL, 33563; Martin B. Main, associate professor and extension wildlife specialist, Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, Southwest Florida Research and Education Center, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Immokalee, FL 34142.

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On-site care for the victim includes several basic rules that should be followed:

DO!

- **Call 911 immediately!**
- Get the victim away from the snake.
- 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. Wash the area of the bite with soap and water.
- Keep the victim warm and as comfortable as possible, and offer reassurance.
- Keep a record of the time of the bite, the victim's symptoms, and any first aid measures. Be sure to give this information to emergency medical personnel. This will help the doctor and Poison Control Center toxicologist determine the severity of the bite and appropriate treatment.
- 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.
- A positive identification of the snake is NOT necessary. 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 wait to seek medical attention until symptoms develop.
- Do not try to catch the snake! This will put yourself (and others) at risk.
- 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 heat or electric shock.
- Do not give any stimulants or alcohol to the victim.

Additional Resources

This document is part of a four-document series produced by the University of Florida/IFAS Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation:

- Dealing with Venomous Snakes in Florida School Yards
- Preventing Encounters between Children and Snakes
- Emergency Snakebite Action Plan
- Recognizing Florida's Venomous Snakes

A CD/DVD set that includes PowerPoint presentations (with speaking notes) and other information on venomous snake safety is available from the IFAS Extension Bookstore (<http://www.ifasbooks.ufl.edu>).

Poison Control Hotline: 1-800-222-1222

Good books on Florida Snakes:

A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America by Roger Conant and Joseph Collins, Houghton Mifflin Company, 3rd edition, 1998 (one of the Peterson Field Guide Series)

Florida's Fabulous Reptiles and Amphibians by Pete Carmichael and Winston Williams, World Publications, 2004

Snakes of North America: Eastern and Central Regions by Alan Tennant, Lone Star Books, revised edition, 2003

Snake resources on the World Wide Web:

Florida Museum of Natural History—Online guide to Florida snakes:

<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/natsci/herpetology/FL-GUIDE/onlineguide.htm>

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission snake page: <http://myfwc.com/critters/snakes.htm>

Partners in Amphibians and Reptile Conservation (PARC) site: <http://www.parcplace.org/index.html>

Snake Handling Equipment

<http://www.tongs.com> (we recommend their Gentle Giant tongs)

<http://www.tomahawklivetrap.com> (we recommend their 60 Super Tube tongs with rubber cushions)