Outdoor workers may be at serious risk of being bitten by venomous snakes.

Snakes are very common on worksites in warm weather. Typical areas where snakes are found are protected areas such as under buildings and near sheds, around rubble and stored materials, in boxes (e.g. electrical switch box), in long grass – and it’s not uncommon for them to enter open unattended vehicles.

Snakes are not usually aggressive and do not seek confrontation with humans but may retaliate if threatened or cornered. All snakes will defend themselves but brown snakes are particularly fast and agile and have a larger strike area than other types. The important thing to remember is to never attempt to catch or kill a snake – most snake bites occur when people are trying to do this. Also, snakes are protected fauna in Australia, so killing them is against the law.

If a snake is encountered, it is best to remain completely still until the snake leaves. Watch where the snake goes – from a safe distance – and alert others to the hazard.

Do not attempt to dispose of an apparently dead snake – firstly, it may not be dead; and secondly, dead and decapitated snakes can deliver a dangerous bite as their biting reflexes remain intact for some hours after death. Alert others to the hazard.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

All workers should wear appropriate PPE. When working in snake-prone areas during summer, this should include gaiters (and heavy gloves if handling items near the ground) to avoid serious risk of being bitten. High visibility clothing makes you stand out to snakes as well as other humans and allows them to see you coming.

First aid kits

Roads and Maritime managers should always ensure first aid kits are available and readily accessible at the workplace. For outdoor workers, the kit needs to include compression bandages. Those performing work in high-risk areas, especially in remote areas, should be trained in the standard first aid treatment for snake bite and carry a kit.

First aid for snake bites

First aid should be given even when a bite appears minor or “just a scratch”. Speed and immobilisation are vital to impede the venom from spreading. The person bitten should sit or lie down and remain as still as possible. Reassure them and encourage them to remain calm and still.

Immediately

1. Wrap the wound firmly – if the first aid kit is not to hand grab the closest thing you can (e.g. long sleeved shirt or belt) and use it to compress the limb, before looking for the kit or seeking help.

2. If others are present, have someone phone for medical assistance or send someone for help.

3. Apply a pressure immobilisation bandage and fully immobilise the limb (see next page). Do not wipe any venom from the bite site – it may be used to decide the most appropriate antivenom if the snake has not been identified.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) procedure


First aid procedure


Identify a particular snake by region

http://www.whatsnakeisthat.com.au
Applying a pressure immobilisation bandage

First Aid for Bites to the Lower Limb
1. As soon as possible, apply a broad pressure bandage from below the bite site, upward on the affected limb (starting at the fingers or toes, bandaging upward as far as possible). Leave the tips of the fingers or toes unbanded to allow the victim’s circulation to be checked. Do not remove pants or trousers; simply bandage over the top of the clothing.
2. Bandage firmly as for a sprained ankle, but not so tight that circulation is prevented. Continue to bandage upward from the lower portion of the bitten limb.
3. Apply the bandage as far up the limb as possible to compress the lymphatic vessels.
4. It is vital to now apply a splint. Bind a stick or suitable rigid item over the initial bandage to splint the limb. Secure the splint to the bandaged limb by using another bandage. (If another bandage is not available, use clothing strips or similar to bind.) It is very important to keep the bitten limb still.
5. Bind the splint firmly, as much of the limb as possible, to prevent muscle, limb and joint movement. This will help restrict venom movement. Seek urgent medical assistance now that first aid has been applied.

First Aid for Bites on the Hand or Forearm
1. As soon as possible, apply a broad pressure bandage from the fingers of the affected arm, bandaging upward as far as possible. Bandage the arm with the elbow in a bent position, to ensure the victim is comfortable with their arm in a sling. Leave the tips of the fingers unbanded to allow the victim’s circulation to be checked.
2. Bind a splint along the forearm.
3. Use a sling to further prevent limb movement.

Source: Australian Venom Research Unit, The University of Melbourne