



Snake Bite Toolkit



Background



Why are snake bites an issue?

Australia is home to around 140 species of land snakes and 32 species of sea snakes. Of these species approximately 100 are venomous and 12 are likely to cause death if they bite, including the brown snake, tiger snake, black snake, death adder and taipan.^(1,2)

Every year in Australia, one to four people die due to snake bites.⁽¹⁾ In addition to these fatalities many people require medical treatment after a snake bite. In Australia from 2005 to 2015, 1,548 people presented to 171 Australian hospitals due to a snake bite.⁽³⁾ Of these patients; the median age was 38 years, 73% were male, 11% were snake handlers and 52% were bitten on a lower limb.⁽³⁾

When do snake bites occur?

Snake bites can happen anywhere, at any time. Many people think that snakes are only found in locations which have dense bushlands, however venomous dugites and tiger snakes are frequently sighted in the metropolitan area as they hunt small mammals, frogs and lizards.⁽²⁾

Leading into summer, snakes can be more active as they; have left their winter locations in search for food or a mate, and being cold blooded reptiles they rely on the sun for their body heat.^(1,4) However snake bites can happen at any point throughout the year.^(1,4)

How can snake bites be prevented?

Fortunately snake bites can be prevented. Always looking ahead of where you are walking, wearing long trousers and enclosed footwear when walking in bushland or grassy areas, removing items around the house which may act as shelter for snakes from the weather, and moving a safe distance away from the snake if you do locate one, can all reduce the risk of being bitten by a snake.⁽⁴⁾

What organisations conduct snake bite poisoning prevention activities in WA?

If a snake has been located the [WA Parks and Wildlife Service](#) (9219 9840) can be contacted for advice regarding what actions should be taken. Additionally the [Wildcare Helpline](#) (9474 9055) is available to provide contact details for local reptile remover.

[The WA Poisons Information Centre](#) is a specialised unit that provides free expert advice on the management of poisonings or suspected poisonings. The information centre can provide management advice for people who have come in contact with a poison or are bitten by a venomous animal, however if the individual has collapsed or has stopped breathing 000 should be phoned.

In the 12 month period between July 2016 and June 2017 the WA Poisons Information Centre handled 149 cases of snake bites that occurred in WA. The majority of people envenomed in these cases were 20-74 (105 cases) and 5-14 (24 cases) years old. The geographical location where the bite occurred was recorded in 37% of cases, with the leading suburbs being Geraldton (11 cases), Bunbury (8 cases) and Broome (7 cases).⁽⁵⁾

What role do Local Governments have in snake bite poisoning prevention?



Local Governments play a direct role in reducing the risk of snake bites occurring within their local area by removing mice and long grass from public spaces, and relocating snakes from recreational areas to a safer location.

In addition to this, Local Governments have the ability to increase their resident's awareness of the dangers of snakes and what actions they can take to reduce their risk of being bitten by a snake.

How can your Local Government or organisation get involved in preventing snakebite poisonings.

ACTIVITY	
AWARENESS RAISING	Contact local radio stations or newspapers to promote poisoning prevention messages.
	Use local statistics on the incidence of snake bites to raise awareness of its incidence at events, on social media or at educational sessions.
	Promote contact details for local reptile removers.
	Install signs in locations where snakes are regularly sighted, such as recreational areas or reserves.
COMMUNITY	Set up a stall or stand in your reception area, recreation centre, local shopping centre, local schools or at community events.
	Display posters and distribute educational resources.
	Reduce the risk of snakes residing in public spaces by maintaining grass and removing mice.
PARTNERSHIPS	Partner with local organisations to implement poisoning prevention activities.
	Contact other organisations who are conducting poisoning prevention activities.
	Promote poisoning prevention activities being conducted by other organisations.

Located within this Toolkit are a range of media templates and suggestions of activities that Local Governments can conduct to generate awareness of snake bites amongst residents.



Communication Templates



Social media is a great channel to generate awareness within your community about the importance of conducting safe behaviours to prevent snake bites and to increase resident's knowledge of appropriate actions to take if someone has been bitten by a snake. Over the next two pages, Injury Matters has provided social media templates for social media, blog post ideas, and a media release for Local Governments and organisations to use leading into the warmer months.

Social Media Posts

1. It's heating up! While the summer days may draw you out into the sun for some fun, remember you're not the only one. Snakes are active in warmer weather – so stay aware and avoid having your day ruined by a bite.
2. Bushwalking and hiking are great ways to stay healthy, explore your city and spend time together. But remember – it may not just be your mates on the path. Always look at least one meter ahead of you to avoid snakes this summer.
3. Whether you're out exploring or working in the yard, always remember to wear long pants and enclosed shoes when in bushland or grassy areas to avoid a snakebite.
4. Found a slithery friend in your yard? Call the Wildcare Helpline on 08 9474 9055 to have them evicted smoothly.
5. Be dramatic. Treat all snake bites as potentially life-threatening. Learn what to do here: <http://ow.ly/4X4q30ILDDs>
6. Find a wildlife rescuer near you! Search by postcode to find your closest wildlife volunteer if you come across lost or injured animals here: <https://www.fauna.org.au/>
7. Do you know how to treat a #bite? Learn what to do here this summer: <http://ow.ly/etb030mhch4>

Blog Topics

1. What to do if you see a snake in your backyard/home
2. How to treat a snakebite - try focus on common snakes in your local government area
3. Highlight local wildlife volunteer organisations - interview or profile them!



Media Release Template



Summer spike in snake bites: preparation the key

Summer is upon us, and with the warmer weather comes snakes. We are urging all members of the public to be aware of correct first aid treatment of snake bites, and how to avoid them.

Snake bites can happen anywhere, at any time. Many people think that snakes are only found in locations which have dense bushlands, however venomous dugites and tiger snakes are frequently sighted in the metropolitan area as they hunt small mammals, frogs and lizards.⁽²⁾

“Leading into summer, snakes can be more active as they forage for food, a mate or simply warmth,” said *Local Government Representative*.

“Snakes can be found around homes, backyards and swimming pools, so it’s vital that we’re all vigilant and prepared.”

Australia is home to around 140 species of land snakes and 32 species of sea snakes, of which about 100 are venomous. About 12 of these venomous snakes are likely to cause death if bitten, including the brown snake, tiger snake, black snake, death adder and taipan.^(1, 2)

Fortunately snake bites can be prevented and measures can be taken to reduce the risk of your or your family being bitten by a snake, including:

- Always looking ahead of where you are walking;
- Wearing long trousers and enclosed footwear when walking in bushland or grassy areas;
- Removing items around the house which may act as shelter for snakes from the weather; and
- Moving a safe distance away from the snake if you do locate one.⁽⁴⁾

If a snake bite does occur:

- Treat all bites, including suspected bites as potentially life threatening.
- Do not wash, squeeze or puncture the bite site.
- Apply a broad pressure, immobilisation bandage.
- Keep the victim calm and still. Do not give food or alcohol.
- Do not allow the victim to walk.
- Get urgent medical/ambulance assistance. Call 000 for the ambulance.
- Do not attempt to catch or kill the snake.
- Bites to the head and trunk must be bandaged as firmly as possible.

The Western Australian Poisons Information Centre has a 24 hour hotline on 13 11 26 for information and support.

-ENDS-

What support can Injury Matters provide?



To assist you in communicating the prevalence of poisonings in your local area, Injury Matters can provide you with data regarding the number of hospitalisations and deaths within your local government or health region due to poisonings.

Located on [Know Injury's Knowledge Hub](#) are a number of fact sheets, resource kits and information to support you to conduct injury prevention activities. These tools can assist Local Government workers who are developing initiatives which aim to reduce the prevalence of snake bite poisonings within their local area.

Finally, Injury Matters have relationships with a number of external organisations who lead the way in reducing the incidence of poisonings in WA. If you are interested in partnering with other organisations to prevent snake bites or simply wish to find out what other work is being conducted to prevent poisonings please contact us.

Partner:



Department of
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PREVENTION TO RECOVERY

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References

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