

How to Survive Venomous Bites

Although the winter months can provide plenty of challenges for preppers, one of the benefits is that it means snakes and spiders have gone into hibernation, taking their venomous bites with them. This winter, though, most areas have seen their nice weather linger, meaning you may still be at risk for exposure to venom. If that were to happen, here's what you need to know.

Know the Risks

First and foremost, you need to start today by understanding which species in your area carry venom. While it's generally a good idea to keep your skin away from spiders and snakes, it's important that you're adept at identifying which could potentially kill you or at least cause severe injury. Also, know that no matter how big, strong or athletic you are, venomous bites are nothing to underestimate.

Prevention Is Better than Survival

The majority of snakes and spiders are not going to go out of their way to attack you. Along with knowing what poisonous animals live in your area, then, make sure you understand what their habitat looks like. While some situations may be unpreventable, most encounters probably begin with a person not understanding they're an unwelcomed guest.

Remain Calm

This is obviously much easier said than done, but if you get bitten, try to concentrate on your breathing. Right now your natural reaction is to let adrenaline take over, but that will mean your heartbeat speeds up too. All that will do is help the poison spread faster throughout your body.

Remove Any Constricting Clothing

Next, get rid of anything you're wearing near the wound that might restrict the flow of blood should swelling follow. If you were bit on the hand, bracelets, watches, and rings would all have to go.

Allow for a Little Bleeding

Most people's first reaction will be to cover the wound or even wrap it in bandaging as soon as possible. However, a lot of venom contains anticoagulants—essentially chemicals that keep your blood from beginning to scab over—this can be a good thing. If you let the wound bleed for a while, it will carry the venom and other potential germs to the surface of your body.

Clean the Wound

Aside from the venom, the bite you've just received is a puncture wound and should be cleaned with soap and water ASAP.

Use a Suction Kit

Later, we'll cover why you should never try to suck the poison out of a wound with your mouth. However, if you have a suction kit on hand, you can apply it to the wound to try and withdraw the venom. The jury is out on whether or not this is actually effective, but it won't hurt. However, do not cut open the bitten area, as was often advised in the past.

Keep the Wound below Your Heart

Leverage gravity to make it more difficult for poison to travel to your heart.

Monitor for Shock

If someone else was bit, you want to monitor their vital signs, as well as keep an eye on them to ensure they don't slip into shock. This is going to be difficult, though, as you don't want to excite them either, which would mean their heart rate speeding up. Instead, talk to them slowly and calmly while you see to their wound and monitor their vitals.

Get to the Professionals

As soon as possible, go see a medical professional. This is a bit different with spider bites, as even extremely venomous species can bite without the victim knowing it right away. Again, that's why it helps to know where these animals live. If you know you're in their territory and you start feeling "funny" (the symptoms of spider venom are difficult to generalize), go see a doctor. Realize that about 80% of reported spider bites were actually something completely different, so err on the side of being safe, not sorry, and you'll be in good company.

What Not to Do

If you've watched enough movies, you may be under the impression that sucking out the venom from your or someone else's wound with your mouth is the way to go. Not surprisingly, though, Hollywood has this 100% wrong. Following this game plan will leave you with poison in your mouth and a new set of germs introduced to the wound.

Don't use tourniquets either. This conventional wisdom at least made some sense, but nowadays, doctors believe the risks of applying a tourniquet outweigh any potential they have to actually slow down the poison.

Lastly, in the case of snakebites, some people have wasted precious time hunting down the animal and killing it so they could bring it to a medical professional. Describing the snake will more than suffice, chasing it down is unnecessary, wasteful, and dangerous.

Although prevention is the best course of action, if you get bit by a poisonous snake or spider, the above steps will greatly increase your chances of survival.

Sources:

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