

# DOs and DON'Ts in case of a snake bite in Zambia

Zambia is home to 102 species of snakes.  
31 can give a dangerous, venomous bite.  
(71 are not harmful to humans).

There is much misinformation on the internet  
about snakebite treatment in Africa.

This poster provides information on correct  
first aid in snakebites in Zambia.



For more information:  
[www.snakesafetyzambia.com](http://www.snakesafetyzambia.com)

**In case of a  
snakebite,  
time is of the essence**



**The shorter the time between the bite and  
proper treatment at a health facility, the higher  
the chance of survival!  
Follow this protocol in any snakebite case**

**KEEP VICTIM CALM - CONTACT EXPERT - TRANSPORT TO HOSPITAL - IMMOBILISE AND ELEVATE LIMB**

## RULE 1:

### **NEVER DO THIS:**

#### **1. Don't waste time!**

If the snake is already dead or if it is safe to do so: make a photo of the snake so that snake experts can identify it. But: **don't waste time!**

The experts can advise on treatment **based on the symptoms.**

#### **2. Don't apply any of the methods below:**

Don't cut or suck the bite site

Don't apply electricity

Don't apply or give alcohol

Don't treat the bite site with heat or cold treatment

Don't apply any traditional medication

Don't apply anti-venom as a first aid measure

Don't apply tourniquet unless advised by a snakebite expert

**All these measures do nothing to neutralise the venom but they waste time!**

## RULE 2:

### **ALWAYS DO THIS:**

#### **1. Calm the bite victim down.**

The calmer the victim is, the slower the venom spreads. 90% of bites occur in limbs, where it can't kill the victim. We want to keep the venom there. Reassure the victim, explain that most snakebites aren't deadly and that there is enough time to reach a health facility.

#### **2. Call a snakebite expert (see box below)**

#### **3. Immediately bring the victim to a health facility**

From the moment of the bite, transport to a health facility must be organised

#### **4. Immobilise and elevate the bitten limb**

The bitten limb must be elevated above heart level. This slows the venom spreading down. Unless an expert has instructed otherwise, keep the limb still, because movement helps in spreading the venom.

#### **5. Observe the victim and note symptom.**

Symptoms may help the doctors give the right treatment. (time of the bite, dizziness, slurred speaking, swelling, pain at the bite site, etc.)

### **Where does the venom go?**

*Popular belief: most people believe venom goes into the **blood stream**. This is **wrong**.*

*In reality: usually venom is injected in **muscles** and absorbed by the **lymphatic system**.*

*The more you move, the quicker you pump the venom from this system to the blood stream and the vital organs, where it can become life-threatening.*

*(An exception is the venom of the Black mamba, which can enter the blood vessels as well as the lymphatic system).*

*After injection, venom spreads through your tissue. It is **impossible** to suck it out!*

### **Traditional medication**

Many believe in the effectiveness of traditional medication in snakebite treatment.

Unfortunately, **THEY DO NOT WORK!**

Bringing a victim to a traditional healer **wastes valuable time.**

*In addition:*

*Traditional healers work in a non-sterile environment with non-sterile instruments and materials. Treating a snakebite victim in such an environment leads to additional problems, such as infections.*

### **Venom in the eye**

Venom in the eye *without a bite on the body* is

**NOT life-threatening!**

And:

It does **not** require anti-venom.

Do the following:

- 1) **Immediately** rinse eye with running water for 15-20 minutes
- 2) Have the eye checked by a doctor

**CONTACT THESE  
SNAKEBITE EXPERTS  
FOR ADVISE**

(AND TO ADVISE THE DOCTOR):

**Marcel van Driel:**

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