



Media Release

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Flying Doctor issues summer snakebite reminder

The Royal Flying Doctor Service South Eastern (RFDS SE) Section is reminding the public of the dangers posed by snakes during the summer months and what to do if bitten. This follows a number of snakebite incidents across the country, requiring the attendance of RFDS emergency retrieval crews.

According to the University of Sydney, Australia is home to 60 species of snakes, including the ten most lethal in the world. There are about 3,000 reported snakebites each year resulting in between 200 and 500 requiring anti-venom and an average of one or two fatalities¹.

“Given the number of incidents each year and our proximity to snakes, even within our cities, it is important that people are mindful of the danger they pose to our health and wellbeing and able to take the appropriate action if an incident occurs,” said James Rozorio, a Flight Nurse with the RFDS SE who has attended snakebite emergencies.

“Surprisingly, snakebites are often painless and may go unnoticed as tissue damage is mostly light - lacerations, scratches or light bruising along with some bleeding or swelling. Symptoms may include an unexplained collapse, vomiting and abdominal pain, bleeding or paralysis.”

Films and television shows have led to the spread of many dangerous myths and misconceptions about how to deal with a snakebite. The most important dos and don'ts include:²

Do try to note the colour, size, distinctive markings and patterns of the snake without putting yourself at risk. A positive identification will help medics get the correct anti-venom into the patient more quickly.

Do NOT wash the area of the bite or try to suck out the venom. It is extremely important to retain traces of venom for use with venom identification kits.

Do NOT incise or cut the bite, or apply a high tourniquet. Cutting or incising the bite won't help. High tourniquets are ineffective and can be fatal if released.

Stop the spread of venom - bandage firmly, splint and immobilise. All the major medical associations recommend slowing the spread of venom by placing a folded pad over the bite area and then applying a firm bandage. It should not stop blood flow to the limb or congest the veins. Only

¹ *Australian Snake Bites* Sydney University, Department of Pharmacology . Last updated April 23 2016.

<http://www.anaesthesia.med.usyd.edu.au/resources/venom/snakebite.html>

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remove the bandage in a medical facility, as the release of pressure will cause a rapid flow of venom through the bloodstream.

Do NOT allow the victim to walk or move their limbs. Use a splint or sling to minimise all limb movement. Put the patient on a stretcher or bring transportation to the patient.

Seek medical help immediately as the venom can cause severe damage to health or even death within a few hours.

James Rozorio was on duty on the day the RFDS SE were tasked to perform an emergency evacuation at Tilpa in North Western NSW. Shane Rawlings had been bitten by a snake on a nearby property.

“Fortunately, his mate had the foresight to apply a pressure bandage to the bite and call the Flying Doctor,” recalls James.

“By the time I got to Broken Hill I was bleeding pretty badly from my gums and I had red blotches on my stomach and legs,” confirmed Shane. “The doctor was pretty honest. He told me they were worried and were transferring me to Adelaide. He advised me to speak with those closest to me, in case I didn’t pull through.”

Shane spent nine days in intensive care, but did live to tell the tale.

“The pressure bandage slowed the spread of the venom long enough for the Flying Doctor to get to me. Without them I wouldn’t have made it,” said Shane.

Advice on how to respond to a snakebite incident and other common first aid situations, including: a heart attack, choking, burns and severe bleeding for people with no medical training is all in the new ‘Fast First Aid’ booklet from the RFDS. It is especially invaluable for those who live on remote properties or in communities that may be some distance from medical help, but is not intended to replace calling 000 for medical aid in an emergency.”

Approved by RFDS health professionals, Fast First Aid’ is FREE and is available until mid-December 2016 in NSW and ACT only. To receive your copy text ‘NOW’ to 0428 044 444.

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ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The not-for-profit Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90%



of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft. In the past year, the South Eastern Section facilitated almost 4,500 clinics, took over 5,500 telehealth calls, had over 49,100 patient contacts and transported almost 8,200 patients.