

SNAKE BITES AND YOUR PET

If your dog happens to be bitten by a venomous snake there is an 80% chance of it surviving if treated quickly. The degree of damage inflicted by a venomous snake is determined by a wide variety of variables. The age and species of snake, the intensity and depth of the fang penetration, the amount of venom injected, the location of the bite, and the size of the dog are just a few of the variables. Venomous snakebites cause severe pain, cell death, numbness, diminished function and, occasionally, loss of a limb. Snake venoms inflict local effects such as inflammation, damage to blood vessel lining, clotting defects and localized tissue destruction. Some venom can also cause neurotoxicity and interfere with nerve transmission resulting in paralysis. In South Africa some common venomous snakes are the black mamba, puff adder and boomslang.



Black Mamba:

The black mamba is not actually black. It takes its name from the interior of its mouth which is inky-black in colour. It has a “coffin-shaped” head and skin colour can vary between olive-brown to grey. They weigh about 1.6kgs and range from 2 to 3 metres in length. Their venom is highly toxic and composed of neurotoxins which affect the nervous system. The anti venom is effective.



Puff Adder: Their colour patterns vary geographically. The head has two well-marked dark bands, one on the crown and the other between the eyes. Large specimens of 190cm in length and weighing 6kgs have been reported. This species is responsible for more snakebite fatalities than any other African snake. The venom of the puff adder is cytotoxic which affects cell structure and the anti venom is only partially effective.



Boomslang: Their colouration is variable. Males are light green but adult females may be brown. Its total length is about 160cm but can exceed 183cm (6 feet). The eyes are exceptionally large and the head is egg shaped. Their weight varies from 175 to 510g. The venom of the boomslang is highly potent, delivered through large fangs located at the back of the jaw. The venom is hemotoxic which disables the blood clotting process. The anti venom is only available from Onderstepoort in Pretoria. WHAT SHOULD YOU DO in the event a snake bites your dog? First, of all, do not take out your pocketknife and cut Xs over the fang marks! Do not attempt to suck venom through those X marks. Do not grab the snake in a fit of anger and attempt to choke it to death. You may be bitten yourself. Instead, you should: • Try and identify the snake by taking note

of its size and colour patterns. • Look the dog over carefully for fang marks, noting that there may be more than one bite wound. • Keep your pet as quiet as possible and seek immediate veterinary attention. Phone ahead and alert your Vet.

COMMON SYMPTOMS Trembling Swelling/Redness Vomiting Paralysis
Unsteadiness Drooling, frothing at the mouth Snake bites and pets