

## Some things that you need to know about snakes

- ~ There are about 160 different species in South Africa, many of which are rarely seen. Only about 20 of these could be considered to have life threatening venom.
  - ~ Snakes are naturally shy creatures that would normally try to hide or escape. Frightened or cornered snakes may exhibit warning signs such as 'hooding', spitting, hissing or open-mouthed mock-striking, letting the aggressor know that they want it to back off.
  - ~ Snakes cannot hear you, but have powerful senses of smell and touch. Acutely aware of movement.
  - ~ Snakes are attracted to food and shelter, and during the mating season they are attracted to members of the opposite sex. They are naturally solitary creatures and do not live in family groups.
  - ~ Snakes go into a period of low activity in the colder months from May to August. They are active in spring and towards the end of March there will be an increase in snake activity as they search for food before the colder months.
- ! Use a torch at night or when in badly lit areas.  
! Snakes are likely to be more active during or immediately after rainstorms.  
! Snakes 'bask' in the early morning sun - **watch where you walk.**

Protective clothing such as long trousers, gumboots or leggings can help to reduce the chances of receiving accidental bites when you're walking in the bush.

### The basic Rules

- Keep the number of your nearest hospital on your phone database.
- If you're in the bush, be aware at all times and check where you walk, sit or place your hands.
- If there's snake food about (lizards, rats, mice, frogs, nesting birds etc.) there will be snakes.
- If you see a snake, **STAND STILL** - don't panic. Tell others where it is and enjoy the sighting.
- Do **NOT** throw things at it or try to kill it or pick it up.
- If possible, slowly move away from the snake without disturbing it.
- If you accidentally stand on, or grab a snake, it might try to bite you, a perfectly natural reaction.
  - If you get bitten, remain calm and move away from the snake, don't try to catch it.
  - Tell someone that you've been bitten.
  - If possible, get someone with First Aid experience to attend to you.
  - Administer a full bandage wrap of the affected limb - not too tight - allow blood flow.
  - Immobilise the limb and get to the hospital. Warn them of your impending arrival.
  - No cuts, injections, stimulants - liquid refreshments only - monitor patient breathing.
  - Remain calm and try not to move around too much.
  - Venom in the eyes must be washed out with as much liquid as possible - water is best.



## Some of the common medically important snakes that you could encounter

### Puff adder

Dominant venom - Cytotoxin  
Grows to about 1.2m  
Slow moving ambush feeder  
Diet - mainly rodents  
Warns by hissing and striking



### Snouted cobra

Dominant venom - Neurotoxin  
Grows to about 2.5m  
Forager; feeds mainly on rodents/birds  
Can become locally residential  
Warns by displaying hood



### Mozambique spitting cobra

Dominant venom - Cytotoxin  
Grows to about 1.5m  
Forager; varied diet, preferring toads  
Can become locally resident  
Sometimes warns with hood display  
Readily spits venom from the lying position



### Boomslang

Dominant venom- Haematoxin  
Grows to about 2m  
Tree dweller feeds mainly on birds/eggs  
Males mainly green, females mainly brown  
Large eye, keeled scales  
Warns with distended throat  
Birds mob this snake



### Black mamba

Dominant venom - Neurotoxic  
Can grow up to 4m +  
Quite territorial, feeds mainly on rodents  
Shy but can be aggressive if confronted  
Warns with a narrow hood and open mouth  
Will lunge at its attacker if provoked



### Stiletto snake

Dominant venom - Cytotoxic  
Grows to about 700mm  
Mainly fossorial dweller, varied diet  
Can embed fangs with a closed mouth - beware  
Warns with arched neck, head downwards

