

SNAKEBITES IN ISRAEL

A 66-year-old man from the Misgav area was bitten by a snake in September and was admitted to Ziv Hospital in Tzefat in serious condition requiring being ventilated and sedated.

Magen David Adom's 101 call centre had received a report of a man bitten on the foot by a snake. Following the bite, the victim developed signs of shortness of breath, abdominal and chest pains. After receiving on-the-spot treatment from a team of MDA medics and paramedics, he was taken to the hospital's intensive care unit while under sedation.

A similar incident occurred in May, when a 24-year-old man died two days after he was bitten by a viper near the village of Bir al-Maksur. The following month a soldier was left in serious condition after being bitten by a snake at a military base in northern Israel. The serviceman was taken to a hospital for treatment and his family informed. In fact, there has been a spate of injuries caused in our area by venomous snake bites this summer.

The most common venomous snake in Israel is the *Vipera palaestinae* (also known as *Daboia palaestinae*) which grows to an average length of some 90 centimeters, although it can reach 130 centimeters. They are mainly nocturnal. Their venom contains a haemotoxin that damages blood circulation and the lymphatic system. They generally feed on small rodents, toads and birds.



Photo: Vipera palaestinae

It is found mostly in northern and central Israel, western Syria, north-western Jordan and Lebanon although it has been seen as far south as Be'er Sheva. Their range is relatively restricted, the distribution being concentrated from the coastal plains to the inland hills.

Of the 42 species of snakes in Israel, only nine are venomous and most of these are only to be found in the south of the country.

The most deadly is the Lebanon Viper (Mount Hermon and Golan Heights). The other seven are the Desert Cobra (Negev), Painted Carpet Viper (Negev, Jordan Valley), Arabian Horned Viper (Arava), Horned Desert Viper (Negev), Sahara Sand Viper (Negev), Pseudocerastes (False Horned Viper) (Negev) and Saraf Ein Gedi (Jordan Valley).

Although the chance of being bitten by a venomous reptile is quite small, as we have seen, attacks do happen and it's best to be prepared when out and about in the countryside. Wearing leather ankle boots reduces the chance of being bitten on the foot or ankle.

The following should be done after a snakebite

- 1) Move the victim beyond striking distance of the snake.
- 2) Have the victim lie down with the wound below the heart.
- 3) Keep the victim calm and at rest, remaining as still as possible to prevent the venom from spreading.
- 4) Cover the wound with a loose, sterile bandage.
- 5) Remove any jewellery from the area that was bitten.
- 6) Remove shoes if the bite is on the leg or foot.
- 7) Call for professional help immediately, giving your precise location.
- 8) If it can be done safely, take a photo of the snake to help the medical professionals identify it to assist in deciding on the correct treatment.

Do not:-

- 1) Bite the wound or make any incision.
- 2) Attempt to suck out venom.
- 3) Apply tourniquet, ice or water.
- 4) Give the person alcohol or caffeinated drinks or any other medications.

