

NEWS AND EVENTS

GUIDELINES FOR THE PREVENTION AND CLINICAL MANAGEMENT OF SNAKEBITE IN AFRICA

Snakebite is a neglected public health problem. Rural populations are frequent victims as they go about their daily food production and animal-rearing activities and even as they enjoy the comforts of their home lives.

Unfortunately, many of these snakebite cases go unreported and thus do not appear in official epidemiological statistics. Health workers often have little or no formal training in the management of snakebite, and appropriate antivenom is rarely available. Therefore, the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Africa has developed Guidelines for the prevention and clinical management of snakebite in Africa with contributions from technical experts.

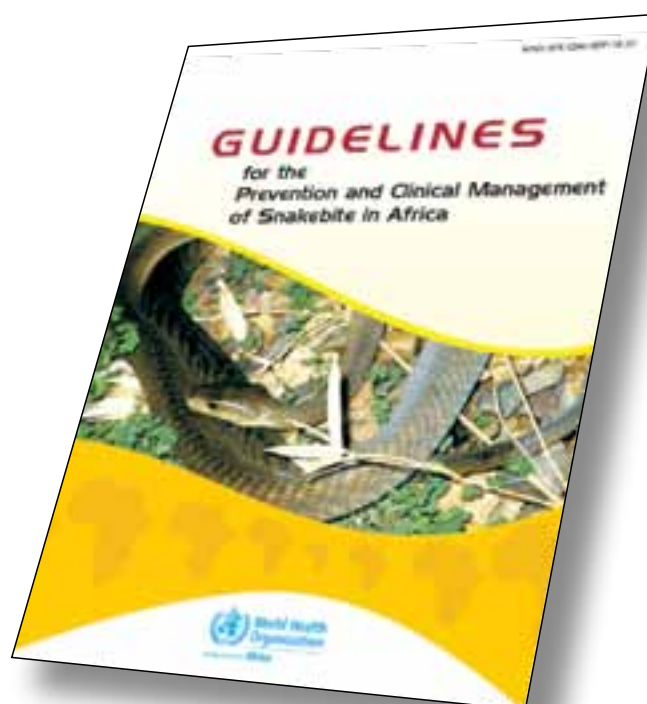
The guidelines are designed to provide useful information and guide the work of various levels of health workers in dealing with snakes and snakebite to improve medical care for snakebite victims. Some sections of the guidelines provide useful and easily understood information for the general public on topics such as snake characteristics and distribution, prevention of snakebite, first aid in case of snakebite, easily observable venom effects in a snakebite victim, and what not to do in case of snakebite.

The guidelines discuss snakes, snake venoms and snakebites and their consequences with emphasis on those causing serious envenoming or the so called medically important snakes. The volume contains over a hundred photographs of snakes, clinical signs of envenoming and the consequences. Various annexes provide further information on such topics as the geographical distribution of African venomous snakes, as well as their classification, habitats and clinical toxinology.

The guidelines also mention traditional practices and beliefs in relation to snakes and snakebite. They emphasize the fact that there are no scientifically

proven traditional antidotes to snake venoms. However, in many rural settings, traditional healers may have a good knowledge of snakes within their environment and they can be useful resource persons in the conduct of community education programmes about snakes and snakebite. Therefore, research should continue to develop more knowledge on effective traditional antidotes.

The guidelines can be accessed through the following website: <http://www.afro.who.int/>
<http://www.afro.who.int/en/divisions-a-programmes/dsd/essential-medicines/highlights.html>



REFERENCE

World Health Organization (2010) Guidelines for the prevention and clinical management of snakebite in Africa. WHO regional Office for Africa, Brazzaville, (Document Reference WHO/AFR/EDM/EDP/10.01)