

# OUTDOOR SAFETY

## Surviving Snakes On A Plane (Or Anywhere Else)

(NAPSA)—Those movie tough guys may be great at extricating guns out of bad guys' hands with bullwhips and the like, but it turns out they know nothing about snakes.

Doctors say cutting and sucking venom out of a snakebite—a favorite on-screen tactic—is actually one of the worst things you can do. Instead, experts say hikers, outdoor enthusiasts and anyone else who's bitten by a snake should stay calm and get to an emergency room for possible antivenom ASAP.

"The longer you go without antivenom treatment, the more tissue damage can occur and the greater your risk of severe symptoms or—in rare cases—even death," says Dr. Russ Kerns of Carolinas Medical Center and Carolinas Poison Center in North Carolina. "Everyone—especially those living in an area with rattlesnakes, copperheads or water moccasins—should know the location of the closest hospital that stocks antivenom. And remember, not all hospitals do."

Every year, about 45,000 people are bitten by snakes in the United States. While only about 7,500 of those bites turn out to be venomous—ultimately resulting in an even smaller figure of about 15 deaths annually—it's worth taking precautions whenever you hit the outdoors. Dr. Kerns offers these tips:

### Stay Alert

The simplest thing to do is listen for the sound of rattlesnakes and stay out of tall grass and reeds to avoid venomous rattlesnakes, copperheads and water moccasins. Also, be cautious when picking up rocks or firewood, or



**If you're bitten by a snake, a hospital that stocks antivenom could be a lifesaver.**

when reaching into the garden.

### Keep Safe

If you are bitten by a snake, don't waste time trying to capture or kill it. Doing so often results in a second bite, and—contrary to another movie myth—you needn't identify the type of snake that attacked in order to be treated. If you can't get to a hospital immediately, wash and immobilize the affected area and keep it lower than your heart. If you have a cell phone, call the local poison center at (800) 222-1222.

### Dress Smart

If you know you'll be in areas with snakes, wear high-cut boots and long pants for protection.

### What Not To Do

In addition to not trying to suck out the venom, don't cut the affected area. This can worsen tissue damage. Also, ice compresses and tourniquets aren't recommended and may, in fact, cause additional harm.

Finally, it may sound like the stuff of horror movies, but Dr. Kerns says even dead snakes can bite you. "They retain their bite reflex, so it's always best to just keep away," he explains.