

# SAFETY SENSE

## The Truth About Snakebites

(NAPSA)—Even when it's dead, a venomous snake can still bite you. And we're not talking about the snakes in Congress or on Wall Street.

We're talking those scaly, legless reptiles—of the subfamily *Crotalinae*—that bite about 8,000 people annually across the country. And contrary to popular belief, they're the last thing a doctor wants to see you walk in with if you're one of those thousands.

"We don't want people bringing a snake into an ambulance or hospital, since they still have a bite reflex for a short time after death," says Erica Liebelt, M.D., Professor of Pediatrics and Emergency medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine.

In fact, it turns out there are a lot of myths about snakes that need debunking before you head out to enjoy the great outdoors. Here are the four most prevalent ones:

### Myth

Snakes only live in the wild.

### Fact

Have you not seen the news about snakes turning up in abandoned, foreclosed houses? They also live in parks, yards, gardens and other unexpected spots, too. Extreme weather sometimes drives them to populated areas in search of food.

### Myth

A bite victim should try to identify the snake that attacked him.

### Fact

Doctors don't need to know that to provide treatment, and there's always the danger of being bitten again—by the same *live* snake—if you try to chase it down. Instead, get to a hospital ASAP. "The



**Seeking immediate medical attention for snakebites is important.**

longer you wait, the more tissue damage sets in, and—although only about 12 people die a year from snakes in the U.S.—the greater the risk of death," says Dr. Liebelt.

### Myth

Hollywood is spot-on when showing movie characters sucking the venom out of a snakebite.

### Fact

Sucking on or cutting the skin around a bite can worsen tissue damage. Don't use a tourniquet or ice compression either—that will only make things worse. If you can't immediately get to a hospital, call the local poison center at (800) 222-1222. Also, wash and immobilize the bite area and keep it at, or just below, your heart.

### Myth

Snakes attack unprovoked.

### Fact

Most people are bitten because they try to handle or get close to a snake. Stay safe by avoiding reeds and tall grass where copperheads, rattlesnakes and cottonmouths often live. And be cautious when gardening or picking up rocks and firewood.