

Snakebite Awareness Training

Part 2: Lesson 11 - Preventing Snakebite When Outside

A Note About the Sources Of This Information

Many of these tips and ideas come from the book “Dangerous Snakes of Africa” by Stephen Spawls and Bill Branch and are used with permission.

Other tips and all photos were taken from this website and are used with permission: <https://www.wikihow.com/Avoid-Snakes>

*This lesson can be used together with the pictures in the **“Preventing Snakebite” slides** available with this manual.*

Because of the factors involved in getting adequate medical care for snakebites in Kenya, the best hope for most people is to avoid snakes altogether to prevent snakebite. This is easier in some parts of the country than others where there are many more snakes. Nevertheless, in the next couple of lessons, we want to help you know what to do to avoid as much as possible a situation where you might suffer from a snakebite. If you develop good habits, it will be easier to do them routinely and stick with them.

Some of these may seem uncomfortable, awkward, or just not necessary, but they could save your life if a snake tries to bite you. Likewise, some of these are expensive and you may not be able to afford them. Do whatever you can from this list to give you the best chance of avoiding a snake encounter.

Start by asking the participants, “Where are the places where you think you are most likely to encounter snakes?” After they give some answers ask, “What are some things you could do to avoid seeking snakes in those places?” Then move on to the lesson below.

What are **the places where you are most likely to encounter a snake outdoors** in areas other than your compound (use the slides provided to show pictures of some of these to participants)?

1. On a warm road at night
2. After a rainstorm
3. Walking down a narrow path through tall grasses
4. Walking on or off trail through a forest
5. Rocky areas where snakes can be concealed
6. Walking in sandy desert areas
7. Walking under tree branches or a fallen tree
8. Gathering firewood or fetching water

To give yourself the best chance of living through a snake encounter, you should be prepared ahead of time:

- **Manage Your Fear By Learning About The Snakes In Your Area** - the more you learn about snakes, the less you will fear them but still respect them and what they can do. If you learn about snake behaviors, you can also learn what to avoid to prevent snakebite.
- **Snakes Do Not Want To Attack You** - one thing we can learn is that snakes would much rather move away from you than confront you. They bite when you step on them, harass them, or they feel threatened by your actions.

- **Understand Snake Habits** - know where snakes like to hide, or where they like to spend time - perhaps for basking in the sun or cooling off in the shade. Good hiding places include rocks and rock piles, trees, logs and branches on the ground, and bushes. Snakes with good camouflage can hide in leaves, sticks, and grasses. See if you can find the snake in this picture.

One situation where you might encounter a snake is if you are walking from one place to another. This could be on a dirt road, or it could be on a path through the forest or fields on your way to work or to a garden. Here are some tips for avoiding encounters with snakes in these situations:

1. **Go Prepared** - If you have a phone, take it with you. If you have any type of compression bandage or splint, take it with you. Take a torch with good batteries so you can see after dark. Wear adequate footwear - do not walk through snake territory in bare feet or sandals. Boots would be the best bet as snakes often bite the foot or ankle. Long pants can offer some protection, but snakes can bite through most clothing. Take a walking stick.
2. **Always Walk With Someone** - if someone is with you when you are bitten by a snake, they can help you with first aid and then get help. **Let someone know** when you are leaving and when you expect to return.
3. **Be Alert To Your Surroundings** - keep your eyes focused on where you are walking; don't get distracted by your phone and take your eyes off the path in front of you; don't let people you are with distract you either. If you have children

with you, make sure you have talked to them about the situation and for them to stay alert too. Look carefully in places where a snake can be concealed.

4. **Stick To The Path** - avoid walking through tall grass, rocks, and other areas where snakes can easily hide. Stay on the path so you can see a snake ahead of it is on the path. You can then stop and wait for it to move on.
5. **Alert The Snake That You Are Coming** - walk with heavy footsteps to make vibrations that the snake can detect and move away. Always use a walking stick to probe the ground in front of you and make a thud with it to make vibrations.



Image courtesy of wikiHow.com

6. **If You See A Snake Observe Its Body Language** - snakes give warning signals that they are threatened and might bite. If a snake is curled up with its **head raised, mouth open, hissing, inflating its body, moving its head back and forth, and for some snakes spreading a hood**, it is feeling threatened and you should slowly back away.

7. **Don't Let A Snake Fool You Into Touching It** - snakes can attack from any position (even if appearing calm); **some snakes fake death**; some snakes can still bite for up to an hour after their head has been cut off. Avoid these situations by not touching any snake. Also, if you are in spitting cobra territory, stay far back from any snake, because these snakes can spit their venom from 2-3 meters away right into your eyes, which could temporarily or permanently damage your vision.



Image courtesy of wikiHow.com

8. **Watch Where You Step** - keep away from cracks or ledges in rocks where snakes can hide; don't step over a branch or rock without stepping up on it and looking to see if a snake is on the other side - if a snake is there, back down and walk a different way.
9. **Watch Where You Put Your Hands** - don't touch anything without looking first; if climbing on rocks wear thick gloves and long sleeved shirts as some protection; look before grabbing onto or brushing up against tree branches; don't pick up a stick unless you know it is actually a stick.



Image courtesy of wikiHow.com

10. **Watch Where You Sit** - check the area around a rock or log where you want to sit and bang on it with your walking stick to chase away any snakes.

11. **Watch Above You** - remember that some snakes like to climb trees. Be careful if you have to walk under low branches or fallen trees.
12. **Watch Where You Go To The Bathroom** - people often urinate or defecate in and around bushes, rocks, and tall grasses where snakes like to hide. Make sure you check the area completely before doing your business.
13. **Watch Where You Walk At Night** - many kinds of snakes are active at night. If you are walking on a road, be aware that snakes often come out onto the road at night to warm themselves. If you can, carry a torch with good batteries so you can watch the path in front of you. Wear good shoes or boots - do not go barefoot or wear sandals. Avoid any place where you cannot see the path in front of you at night.



Image courtesy of wikiHow.com

Other important things to do when outside:

- Be careful walking after a rainstorm - snakes often become more active during these periods
- Don't gather firewood or move materials around after dark.
- If you need to move wood or other materials during the day, always move or roll the object toward you so a snake underneath can escape away from you.
- If you have to kill a snake that threatens you or your family, use something long that will keep you away from the snake.
- Never sleep on the ground
- Don't run over a snake on the road intentionally as it could pose a hazard to others using that road

If you see a snake when walking around outdoors, what should you do?

- Remain calm - don't panic!
- Don't approach the snake - observe from a distance
- Stay as still as you can and don't make sudden movements
- Wait for the snake to move on by itself - but keep an eye on any retreating snake
- Do not harass the snake
- If you accidentally corner a snake and it is threatened, slowly back away from it until out of range
- If a child sees a snake, they should forcefully tell their parents about it

Next we will look at how to prevent snakebite at home.

At this point, you could assess how much they have learned by doing one of the following types of activities found in the lesson ***“Learning Activities”***.

- Role-playing exercise
- Knowledge competition
- True or Not True
- This or That