

Snakebite Awareness Training

Part 2: Lesson 12 - Preventing Snakebite At Home

A Note About the Sources Of This Information

Many of these tips are adapted from the book “Dangerous Snakes of Africa” by Stephen Spawls and Bill Branch and are used with permission. The same information is also available from the World Health Organization in Chapter 4 of “Guidelines for Prevention and Clinical Management of Snakebite in Africa”.

My uncle lived in Zambia for awhile, and I remember him telling me the story of getting up one night when the house was dark and seeing what he thought was his belt on the floor - but he thought to turn on a light, and there was a black mamba on the floor of his bedroom.

Nothing could be more scary than finding a 2-m long and deadly black mamba in your home at night. Or working in your garden and coming across a puff adder. But there are steps you can take that might save your life in that situation, and that give you a better chance of keeping snakes away from your home.

Consider implementing as many of these steps as you can at your home, or at your school, or other places where a snake might be found in or around a building.

Most Likely Places To Encounter a Snake In Your House

Why would snakes come into my house? The most likely reasons a snake would come into your home are:

1. There are animals present in your house, so they are looking for food
2. There are places for the snake to hide and rest

How do snakes get into my house? First of all, because of the shape of their bodies, snakes are masters at fitting into small spaces. Therefore, any hole or crack in the walls or rooftop can be a place where snakes can enter.

Many houses in Kenya, especially in rural areas, do not have a door and there are no screens or glass in the windows. So these are the two most common entrances for snakes.

Where would I most likely find a snake in my house? These are places you might want to check.

1. Under your bed
2. Behind furniture
3. In a drawer in furniture
4. In the rafters supporting your roof
5. Near food containers (waiting for rodents)
6. In a storage area
7. Under clothing left on the floor or inside your shoes/boots
8. Along the walls or in the corners of a room

Making Sure Your Home Is As Safe As Possible

1. Get into a routine of checking your home for snakes in the morning and evening before you go to bed, and stick with this routine.
2. To the degree that you can, try to seal or cover any holes or cracks in your home where a snake can get in:
 - a. If you have a door, put something like a piece of rubber under the space at the bottom of the door to block it so snakes cannot crawl under the door.
 - b. Patch up or cover any holes in your walls and roof so that snakes do not have an easy entrance to your house.
 - c. Close your windows at night, or put wire screens over them to keep out snakes AND mosquitoes
3. ALWAYS look before you put your feet on the floor
4. Always look before you sit on furniture or on the floor
5. Before you go to bed at night:
 - a. Check under your bed if you have one
 - b. Check in any spaces behind furniture or pillows in the furniture
 - c. Check along the walls of the room

- d. If you have rafters under the roof, make sure no snakes are resting there
 - e. If you have a bed with mosquito nets, tuck the mosquito netting under the mattress.
 - f. During the night, do not get up or leave the house for a bathroom break without using a torch - remember that some snakes are very active at night
6. When you wake up in the morning:
- a. Check the floor before you get out of bed or next to your space on the floor
 - b. Do a recheck of all of the places you checked before you went to bed
 - c. Check inside your shoes and boots if you are wearing them during the day (not only for snakes, but also spiders and scorpions).

What to do if there is a snake in your house

1. The first thing to do if you see a snake in your house is to remain calm.
2. Get children and animals away from the snake. They are more likely to act unpredictably and cause the snake to feel threatened.



Source: wikiHow.com

(<https://www.wikihow.com/Deal-With-a-Snake-in-the-House>)

3. Stay calm and do not harass the snake by poking it, prodding it, or getting too close to it.
4. Take a minute to assess the situation and try to identify the snake as best as you can. How long is it? How thick is it? What color? Does it have stripes or patterns? Is it raised up off the ground? Is it spreading a hood? Here are some general rules for identification (adapted from Stephen Spawls and Bill Branch in "Dangerous Snakes of Africa"):

- a. If the snake is more than 2 m long, it is probably dangerous
 - b. If the snake raises the front of its body off the ground, and flattens its neck or spreads a hood, it should be considered dangerous
 - c. Any snake with dark bars, bands, blotches, rings, or V-shapes on the throat, neck, body, or back is probably dangerous
 - d. Any fat-bodied snake with a triangular head should be considered dangerous
 - e. If it forms C-shaped coils and makes a noise when it rubs its scales together, it is dangerous
5. Avoid getting close to the snake if you are not 100% sure whether it is venomous. Stay at least 3 m away if possible, especially if it is a cobra and you don't know if it can spit.
 6. Don't leave the snake alone, but keep your eyes on it to make sure it doesn't move to another area of the house
 7. If the snake is non-venomous, calm, and coiled, you can put an open bucket or box over the snake to keep it secured. Don't get your feet or hands close to the snake.
 8. If the snake is not venomous, and it is not moving out of the house on its own, try one of these:
 - a. Make sure all doors are open and gently guide (do not push) the snake out of the room through the open doors
 - b. Guide the snake into an open bucket, then put the lid on from a distance with your broom handle. Do not put your fingers near the open bucket.



Source: wikiHow.com

(<https://www.wikihow.com/Deal-With-a-Snake-in-the-House>)

9. Try not to kill the snake if it is non-venomous because they do serve an important purpose in nature, including to humans. However, if the snake is venomous and poses a threat to you or your family, you can and should protect yourself. If you have to kill the snake, use something that has a long handle so you do not get within striking distance of the snake. **Bites or having venom spit into your eyes often occurs when people are trying to kill a snake and they get too close.** Also, once the snake is dead, do not get near the head for at least one hour, because snakes can still bite for a time once they are dead.
10. Snake removal services are available in some parts of Kenya (as well as Uganda and Tanzania). Those resources are listed

below. Even if these are not in your area, you may be able to get someone to respond if they are available.

Emergency Snake-Bite & Snake Rescue/Removal

● **KENYA**

- **EMERGENCY SNAKE BITE: +254 729403599**
- Kenya general/Kilifi County/Coast: +254 707577748 (Bio-Ken duty number)
- Rift Valley: +254724223631 (Felix Namuni)
- Rift Valley/Naivasha +254 715227493 (Benjamin Hellerstedt)
- Nairobi: +254 723 386558. +254 707 577748 or +254 722 514398 (Kyle Ray & Anthony Childs)
- Nairobi: +254 723271510 (Ollie Outram)
- Kilifi County: 0734600055 (Dudley Lucas)
- <http://www.bio-ken.com/>

● **UGANDA**

- The Surgery (competent snake-bite treatment & antivenom):
 - ER Reception: +256 (0) 31 225 6008
 - Ambulance: +256 (0) 752 756003
- The Herp Fauna Foundation Uganda: +256 752 681903 (Mukasa Emmy) mukaemy92@gmail.com
- Thomas Price (snake removal):
thomasbprice@hotmail.com, Tel. +256 794 288 721
- James Ntulume: Tel. +256 772 400 890

● **TANZANIA**

- Meserani Snake Park (Arusha):
 - Lyn: +255 754 440 800
 - Deon: +255 754 302 179
 - Email: snakepark@habari.co.tz