



Combined Joint Task Force One Safety Alert 12-003 8 Jun 12



Unclassified

Subject: Venomous Snakes of Afghanistan (THEY CAN CAUSE DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY)

Venomous snakes are found throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan. Assume that any snake you encounter is venomous: Leave it alone and unmolested! As tactical situations permit, avoid high risk habits. Locate bivouacs away from piles of brush, rocks or other debris.

Remediate conditions which attract snakes. Such as, woodpiles, rock piles, construction debris, dumps, dense undergrowth and similar shelter for snakes. Store supplies elevated off the ground. Practice good sanitation. Control rodents, they are a snakes main food source. Practice "snake smart" behavior. Shake out bedding and clothes before use.

Snake Venoms and Their Effects:

- The venom of the snakes is a complex mixture of generally two types of proteins, each distinguishable by its activity.
- One category of venom is the neurotoxins. These venoms affect the nervous system, causing destruction or paralysis of the nerves that regulate heartbeat and respiration. Victims may die from asphyxiation or heart failure.
- The other major group is the hemotoxic venoms with proteins that attack blood cells and also destroy both muscular and vascular tissue. Hemotoxic venoms allow blood to escape into the surrounding tissue, causing severe swelling, pain and discoloration at the site of the snakebite. Victims may die from shock.
- All snake venom has both neurotoxins and hemotoxins. The venom of vipers and pit vipers is primarily hemotoxic with only a small neurotoxic component which causes pain, blistering, hemorrhaging and digestion of tissue around the bite wound. The venom of cobras, kraits and sea snakes contain a higher percentage of neurotoxins. Their venom produces much less obvious symptoms but can affect nerves far removed from the site of the bite.
- Antivenin is available which can neutralize the effects of snake venom.



Effects of Venom



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Types of Snakes in Afghanistan:

COBRAS AND KRAITS:

- Cobras are recognized by the hoods that they flare when angry or disturbed. The Indian cobra has a wide black band on the underside of the neck, and a hood marking design which shows half-rings on either side of the hood; the Oxus cobra lacks this distinctive hood marking. Cobras in the Afghanistan region are more active during the early evening and early morning. Cobras can be very aggressive when they are protecting their nest and eggs. Oxus and Indian cobras do not “spit” venom but when biting they hold on and chew savagely.
- Common kraits are smooth, glossy bluish-black snakes with narrow white cross bands and the rounded head slightly distinct from the neck. The body color varies from a dark steely blue-black in a specimen which has freshly shed its skin to a pale faded bluish gray in one just about to shed. Common kraits usually prowl on hot, humid nights and are quite agile in their movements. They have a tendency to seek shelter in sleeping bags, boots, and tents. Specimens disturbed during day rarely bite, but at night they are extremely dangerous and aggressive. This snake is of special concern to soldiers. It’s venom is about 15 times more deadly than that of the Indian cobra.



PIT VIPERS

Haly's and Himalayan pit vipers are small snakes, with a total length around 90-100 cm long. The color of the skin varies from gray, brown to red, dark green or even black. The pit vipers are generally considered to be the most advanced family of snakes since they possess a very sophisticated venom delivery system. Large tubular fangs are placed in the front of the mouth and they are hinged, allowing them to be folded back when not in use. Their heads are covered with numerous small scales and their eyes have vertically elliptical pupils. Pit vipers have a pair of heat sensing pits located between each eye and nostril. Their venom is primarily hemotoxic, causing pain, blistering, hemorrhaging, and digestion of tissue around the bite wound. These snakes are mainly nocturnal, resting during the day beneath stones or shrubs, and during warmer months, emerging only after sunset. Reports vary as to aggressiveness. Pit vipers usually will not strike unless continuously disturbed or hurt, however, have been known to bite with only minor provocation. Pit vipers are active from the end of March until October.



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PIT VIPERS (continued)



VIPERS

Vipers typically have broad, triangular heads. Most species are also heavy-bodied with relatively short, slender tails. Most vipers have numerous and heavily keeled body scales. Their long fangs permit deep penetration and envenomation of prey. Their venom is primarily hemotoxic, some with a neurotoxic component, and cause pain, blistering, hemorrhaging, and digestion of tissue around the bite wound.

- Russell's vipers are one of the most dangerous snakes of the Afghanistan region. These snakes are short-tempered and very aggressive. When disturbed, they strike with great force and speed. Russell's vipers are medium-sized to large snakes with strongly keeled scales, a distinctive bright chain pattern, and a large triangular head. They are predominately nocturnal but active by day during cool weather.
- Saw-scaled vipers are rough-scaled snakes with large eyes, a head wider than the neck and a stocky body. Their scales are heavily keeled. The body is brown, grayish or sandy with a darker zigzag pattern on the back and a distinct cross or lance mark on the head. Most species are generally nocturnal during hot dry weather; during the day they are found under rocks, in mounds of dead plant stalks, or in bushes up to height of 2 meters or more. Saw-scaled vipers assume a defensive figure eight coil when encountered, rubbing body scales together to produce a distinctive rasping sound. These snakes are involved in many snakebite incidents and numerous fatalities almost everywhere throughout their range, and are considered to be some of the most dangerous snakes in world because of their venom toxicity and high population densities. Saw-scaled vipers are extremely short-tempered, aggressive, and will strike without provocation.





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VIPERS (continued)

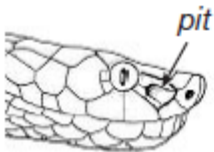


Snake Identification

VIPERS/PIT VIPERS



Long, hinged fangs that tuck into roof of mouth when not in use.



Vertically elliptical eye pupils; pit vipers with heat sensing organ between eye and nostril.



Broad triangular head with narrow neck and wide body.

COBRAS/KRAITS/SEA SNAKES



Short fangs fixed in erect position in front of mouth.



Round eye pupils.



Elongated head about the same width as the body.

Snake Distribution:

The various types of Venomous Snakes are generally found within the following geographic area.

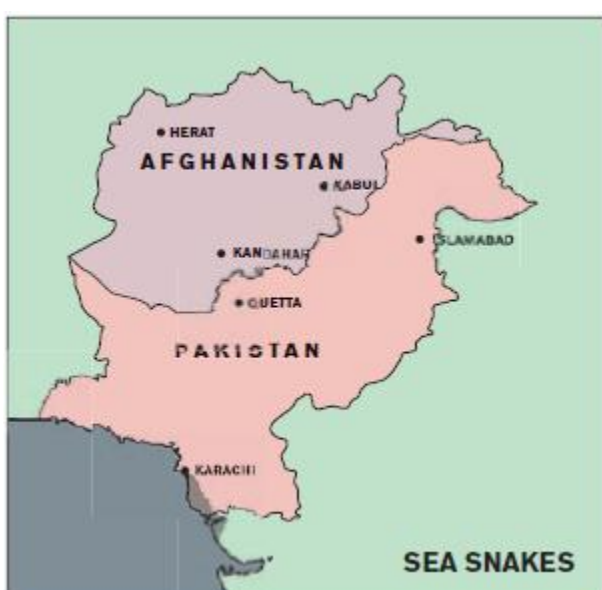


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Snake Distribution



Prevent Being Bitten:

- Don't eat food in the tent!
- Walk at night with a flashlight to see snakes
- Look before you put your hand or foot into a small place
- Use caution around buildings or storage boxes, as animals like to hide underneath

Food=Crumbs=Mice=SNAKES!

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What To Do If You Get Bit:

- Remain calm
- Collect / Kill the animal and bring with you
- Get to a medical facility ASAP!
- Don't panic, staying calm will help slow the spread of venom
- Apply a pressure dressing around the site to slow the spread of venom
- Anti-venom is available in RC-East
- Death is rare when medical treatment is received within the first hour



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