Snakes
Risk management guidance
Work Health and Safety Directorate

Snakes may occasionally enter school sites. Spring and summer are when snakes are more active.
This factsheet provides guidelines for the prevention and management of this hazard.

Risk Factors

- The greatest risk of snake–bite from venomous snakes is by people trying to kill or handle them. This is why no child or non-expert should even contemplate the handling of a snake
- Long grass
- Snake habitats such as ponds, piles of timber and sheets of galvanized iron.
- Vermin that attracts snakes
- Students and teachers unsure of first aid procedures and action plans in case of contact with a snake

Prevention Strategies

- Ensure long grass is cut back
- Remove snakes access to water within the site where possible
- Remove snake habitats such as ponds, piles of timber and sheets of galvanized iron.
- Maintain clean yards and surroundings to reduce the mice population
- Ensure an action plan is ready should a snakebite occur.

- Ensure that first aid procedures and hospital/doctor/ambulance phone numbers are clearly displayed in the staff room.
- Provide students and staff specific instructions regarding the correct procedures to adopt if they encounter a snake.

Response

Encountering a snake

- Remain calm and motionless in the first instance
- Leave the snake alone and give it the opportunity to escape
- Move slowly to a safe distance observing the position of the snake at all times
- Alert students and staff (advise them to stay calm and keep away)
- If possible, monitor the snake from a safe distance (at least 5 metres away)
- If the snake remains and is perceived to be a threat, contact your Workplace Manager who should arrange for a licensed local herpetologist who can attend with a view to catching and relocating the snake (for a fee). For information on your nearest snake catcher please see the NSW Government’s Environment and Heritage reptile handlers list.

- Please Note: All snakes are protected in NSW and killing one is an offence. Only licensed people are allowed to catch or keep snakes.
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Recovery Actions

- Conduct a primary survey (DRSABCD)
- Immediately apply a firm bandage over the bite marks or scratches
- Apply Pressure Immobilisation Technique
- Maintain continued pressure and immobilise, ensuring the patient doesn’t move
- Rest and reassure patient
- Call an ambulance – 000 (triple zero) or arrange transport if isolated
- Do not wash bite as a venom sample can be used to identify the snake
- Do not cut or suck the bite to drain venom
- Do not apply a tourniquet
- Be prepared – resuscitation may be required

Research shows very little venom reaches the circulatory system if the pressure immobilization technique is applied immediately and maintained.

Other Considerations

- Schools should review any risk management plans or Emergency Management Plans for areas where snakes are known to frequent or the environment would be conducive to snakes. While reviewing relevant plans, schools should refer to the WHS Fact Sheet – Snake Awareness for advice on identifying the reasonably foreseeable snake hazards as well as the selection of suitable controls.

Further Information

- For assistance in reviewing Risk Assessments and Risk Management Plans refer to the WHS Directorate’s Risk Management Procedures and Tools or contact your WHS Consultant or call the hotline on 1800 811 523
- NSW Environment and Heritage