Clinical Practice Guidelines:
Toxicology and toxinology/Snake bite

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Purpose                       To ensure a consistent approach to the management of Snake bite.
Scope                         Applies to all QAS clinical staff.
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Snake bite

Australia has some of the most venomous snakes in the world including brown, tiger, black, taipan, death adder snakes and certain sea snakes. All of these snakes are found in Queensland, in addition to exotic snake species found in zoos.

All patients with a history of possible snake bite should be transported to hospital for ongoing assessment and management as life-threatening effects may take from minutes to hours to present.

If there is any doubt as to the validity of the bite, treat it as a snake bite.[1,2,3]

Clinical features

- **Non-specific symptoms present in most cases:**[2]
  - nausea, vomiting, headache, abdominal pain, diarrhoea and diaphoresis
- **Other signs or symptoms that may present:**[2]
  - altered mental status, visual disturbances and seizures
  - respiratory dysfunction
  - hypotension, haemorrhage or haematoma at site
  - paired or single fang marks or scratch marks and swollen or tender glands of affected limb

- **Systemic effects (depending on particular venom):**[2]
  - **Neurotoxicity**
    - drooping of eyelids/drooling are early signs.
    - paralysis (monitor airway patency/protection and ventilatory rate, rhythm and effort)
  - **Coagulopathy**
    - bleeding from nose and gums common, major haemorrhage uncommon
  - **Myotoxicity**
    - damage to skeletal muscles (muscular pain, tenderness and weakness)
  - **Renal impairment/failure**

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Risk assessment

- Do not attempt to capture or injure the snake.
- Most Australian snake bites are associated with minimal local pain and bite marks can be easily missed.
- Snake bite may present with or without deep puncture wounds, may be a series of abrasions, scratches, superficial lacerations.
- Children are at high risk due to the poison/venom dose relative to their body weight.

Additional information

- All snake bites that result in cardiac arrest should be transported to hospital for anti-venom.

Note: Officers are only to perform procedures for which they have received specific training and authorisation by the QAS.