

Beware of our not so furry friends this summer

As you make the most of the long, hot summer in the lead-up to Australia Day, you should also be aware that some other quintessential Aussies have come out to enjoy the weather.

January is the prime time for snake and spider bites. Last year between 1 January 2009 and 30 November 2009, there were a total of 8577 snake and spider bites treated in NSW Emergency Departments, with the majority of these coming from rural and coastal areas. Blue bottle stings are also very common at this time of the year on NSW beaches.

Summer is not only the time that the creepy crawlies are out and about, but also the time when most Australians spend time outdoors and are least likely to be wearing shoes.

Clinical toxicologist at Calvary Mater Newcastle Hospital, Dr Geoff Isbister, says that many snake bites can be avoided by people wearing appropriate shoes and long pants when walking in the bush. He has also urged families to learn how to respond to snake and spider bites quickly and properly, and to seek medical attention if they occur.

“Swift administration of first aid is crucial and can help save the life of someone who has been bitten by a snake or spider,” Dr Isbister said.

The bites from snakes and funnel web spiders require the same first aid, because the way the poison spreads through the body. The procedure is:

- Call ‘000’
- Place a firm bandage to the limb (arm or leg) commencing at the bite site, then wrapping down to the fingers or toes and then up to the limb to the hip or shoulder
- Keep the limb still with a splint
- Bring transport to the patient
- The patient should ideally not attempt to walk or run
- Under no circumstances should the bandage be removed until the patient has reached hospital

The first aid for Red Back Spider bite is to apply an ice pack and seek medical attention.

The first aid for Blue Bottle stings is immersion in hot water (45 degrees Celsius) for 20 minutes or where this is not available using a hot shower to warm the sting.

Please see following page for a table showing the number of bites and stings treated by NSW Emergency Departments in January-November 2009.

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Counts of Emergency Department visits that were assigned a diagnosis of a bite or sting, 89 NSW Emergency Departments, 1 Jan - 30 Nov 2009

Area Health Service	Number of ED Visits
Greater Southern Area Health Service	526
Greater Western Area Health Service	484
Hunter and New England Area Health Service	2200
North Coast Area Health Service	1127
Northern Sydney and Central Coast Area Health Service	1117
South Eastern Sydney and Illawara Area Health Service	1471
Sydney South West Area Health Service	953
Sydney West Area Health Service	699

Source: NSW Emergency Department Data Collection (HOIST), Centre for Epidemiology and Research, NSW Department of Health.

Notes: includes diagnoses of bites and stings from insects, spiders, snakes, and marine stingers. Childrens Hospital at Westmead is included in SWAHS counts.