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media release

Stay alert to summer bites and stings

While most Australians enjoy spending time outdoors during summer, it is important to remain alert to potentially dangerous animals, insects and reptiles.

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.

January is the prime time for snake and spider bites. On average across NSW, there are more than 1000 presentations to emergency departments each January from snake and spider bites, 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.

Before you kick off the shoes and make ready for summer relaxation take a moment to consider the creepy crawlies which are also coming out to play.

Clinical toxicologist at Calvary Mater Newcastle Hospital, Dr Geoff Isbister, has 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 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.

Dr Isbister said avoiding bites from the everyday mosquito was also very important due to the seasonal increase in the number of cases of Ross River Fever and Barmah Forest Virus.

"While we enjoy the outdoors during summer, it's important to remain alert to potentially dangerous animals, insects and reptiles, and to take precautions against mosquito bites," Dr Isbister said.

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