

Snakebites: Are You Prepared?

Snakes hibernate in the winter but become active as the weather becomes warmer. The Maryland Poison Center has already been consulted on a few snakebite cases this spring that required treatment with antivenom. CroFab™ is the antivenom that is indicated for bites from the two poisonous snakes in Maryland, the Copperhead and the Timber Rattlesnake, both pit vipers. The recommended loading dose of CroFab™ in a patient exhibiting progressive envenomation is 4-6 vials. If initial control (defined as complete arrest of local manifestations and return of coagulation tests and systemic signs to normal) is not achieved, an additional 4-6 vials should be given until control of signs and symptoms is noted. After initial control is achieved, 2 vials are given every 6 hours for up to 18 hours (3 vials). Additional 2-vial doses may be given as deemed necessary by the treating physician.

In 2004, there were 12 poisonous snakebites reported to the Maryland Poison Center in which CroFab™ was administered. The cases occurred in the following counties: Allegany, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Calvert, Frederick, Howard, Washington, Wicomico, and Baltimore City. The average dose of CroFab™ required was 10 vials. According to the manufacturer, a median of 12 vials were used in clinical trials, with a range of 3 to 18 vials. Most of the hospitals in Maryland stock CroFab™, but many only stock 2-6 vials. Check to make sure that you have CroFab™ in stock and in adequate amounts. The Maryland Poison Center recommends having 18 vials available; enough CroFab™ to treat one patient. Transferring patients to hospitals with a supply of antivenom or waiting for antivenom to be transported to your hospital delays treatment which can result in an increase in tissue damage and other morbidities. If your hospital pharmacy does not have 18 vials, make sure that your staff knows how much is available, and how and where to get more quickly, if needed. The Maryland Poison Center maintains a list of hospitals that stock CroFab™. Call the poison center immediately for assistance in the diagnosis and treatment of snakebites and for help in locating and obtaining CroFab™.

Lisa Booze, PharmD, CSPI

DID YOU KNOW THAT... There are several "treatments" for poisonous snakebites that are no longer recommended?

There are no first aid measures that have been proven to improve the outcome of snake envenomations. Incision and suction, tourniquets, and ice are not recommended. Constricting bands are often applied by prehospital providers, but probably do not alter the course. If applied incorrectly or not loosened as edema progresses, bands will result in occlusion of venous or arterial blood flow. Surgical fasciotomy is rarely indicated and should be avoided unless compartment syndrome has been documented.



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If you do not wish to receive faxes or emails from the Maryland Poison Center, call 410.706.7604 or circle your fax number and fax this back to 410.706.7184. Supported by Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene