

Life s-s-s-saver? WHO launches snake venom website

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(AP) -- The World Health Organization launched a website Tuesday it hopes will help cut the estimated 100,000 deaths caused annually by snake poison.

The site contains a database of approved antivenoms to treat the 2.5 million people who suffer venomous bites each year, the U.N. health agency said.

Antivenoms - antidotes developed from the venom itself - can prevent disability or death, but WHO says many are inappropriate and have led to a loss of confidence among doctors and patients, especially in tropical and subtropical countries.

"The regions that are most in need are Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia," said Ana Padilla, a snake venom expert at WHO.

Apart from South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania, most Sub-Saharan African countries lack the necessary labs to identify snake poisons and to produce sufficient amounts of [antivenom](#), she said.

In Asia, the greatest needs are in Cambodia, Nepal, Bangladesh and Laos, said Padilla.

"The Americas are in a much better situation," she said, noting that even poorer countries in Latin America have their own labs.

WHO's coordinator for medicine safety, Dr. Lembit Rago, said most deaths and serious consequences from [snake](#) bites such as paralysis or [amputation](#) are preventable if the proper antivenom is administered in time.

More information: WHO snake bite website: <http://bit.ly/afzgEF>

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