

New study finds 93 million people vulnerable to death from snakebites

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A new scientific study finds 93 million people live in remote areas with venomous snakes and, if bitten, face a greater likelihood of dying than those in urban settings because of poor access to anti-venom medications.

The study, conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, was published today in the international medical journal, *The Lancet*.

"One's vulnerability to snakebites represents a nexus of ecological contexts and public health weaknesses," said Dr. David Pigott, one of the study's authors and assistant professor at IHME. "Understanding where venomous snakes live and people's proximity to effective treatments are the two most important steps toward reducing deaths. Our analysis identifies communities in greatest need."

According to Pigott, nations whose people are most vulnerable include: Benin, Congo (Brazzaville), Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and South Sudan.

He and the other researchers identified the regions and nations where it is hard to access treatment. In addition, they generated range maps of 278 species of venomous snakes listed by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The study cross-referenced this data using criteria such as transport time

to care facilities with anti-venom medications and quality of care based a [health care access](#) and quality index, which examines 32 causes from which death should not occur in the presence of effective [health](#) care.

In May, the WHO mandated that a comprehensive plan be developed supporting countries in implementing measures for greater access to treatment to people bitten by [venomous snakes](#). This followed a declaration last year that poisoning from snakebites is a neglected tropical disease.

Other research concludes that an estimated 5 million people are bitten every year by [poisonous snakes](#), and about 125,000 of them die. As a result, it is one of the most burdensome neglected tropical diseases.

"In spite of the numbers, snakebites received relatively limited global attention," said Professor Simon Hay, Director of Geospatial Science at IHME. "We hope this analysis can broaden the discussion about snakes."

Researchers from the Geneva-based Université de Genève and the Hôpitaux Universitaires de Genève participated in the study.

"Thanks to this model, we were able to construct three maps that allowed us to uncover the three hot spots in terms of these three criteria, focusing most heavily on the zones where the individuals are most vulnerable," said Nicolas Ray, researcher at the Institute of Environmental Sciences and at the Institute of Global Health at Université de Genève .

Provided by Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation

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