

Around two queries a week to UK poisons service concern... snakebites

19 December 2012

Snakebite injuries account for around two phone queries every week to the UK National Poisons Information Service, indicates an audit published online in *Emergency Medicine Journal*.

Changes in data recording mean that these figures are probably an underestimate of the true numbers of snakebite injuries in the UK, suggest the authors.

They audited telephone enquiries made to the Cardiff, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Newcastle units of the UK National Poisons Information Service (NPIS) between 2004 and 2010.

Some 510 calls about snakebites were made during this period, over half of which (52%) concerned the European adder (*Vipera berus*), the only [poisonous snake](#) that is native to the UK.

Although poisonous, an adder snakebite is rarely fatal, with only 14 deaths attributed to its bite since 1856, but a bite can nevertheless be serious because of its effects on the heart and consequently other organs, and excessive localised swelling.

One in four of the enquiries (26%) were about exotic snakes that had been imported and kept as pets. The most common of these were corn or [rat snakes](#) (27%), boas (20%), [pythons](#) (20%) and western hognose (11%).

Three per cent of the exotic [snake bites](#) were from poisonous snakes, including rattlesnakes and green mambas. The rest of the cases concerned other UK native, non-poisonous snakes (4%) and unidentified snakes (18%).

The average age of the injured was 32, but ranged from under a year to 87, with two thirds of them occurring in men and boys. Enquiries peaked in August (19%).

Almost half the enquiries (42%) concerned the consequences of a poisonous bite, with 85 cases deemed in need of anti-venom.

More information: Snakebite enquiries to the UK National Poisons Information Service: 2004-2010 [doi 10.1136/emered-2012-201587](https://doi.org/10.1136/emered-2012-201587)

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