

Media Release

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 Wednesday, 11 December 2013

Australians in the dark when it comes to first aid for venomous bites and stings

Leading Australian venom expert calls for greater awareness of first aid after survey¹ highlights worrying misconceptions and finds majority wouldn't know what to do if bitten or stung by a venomous creature.

With some of the most venomous creatures on earth, including the box jellyfish, spiders, snakes and even the loveable platypus, it's no surprise that one in two Australians reported they have personally been bitten or stung by a venomous creature or know someone who has.

According to a new survey¹ conducted by bioCSL, despite the high numbers of bites and stings, 84 per cent reported they were not absolutely confident about how to treat venomous bites and stings.

Leading Australian toxinologist Associate Professor Julian White, Head of Toxinology at the Women's and Children's Hospital, says the survey shows we could all do with brushing up on our basic first aid for bites and stings.

"The findings highlight that despite the vast array of venomous creatures in Australia, the majority of people don't know what to do if they're unfortunate enough to be bitten or stung by one. It's important to remember that knowing proper first aid might save your life—or someone else's, particularly if you're in a remote area with limited access to a doctor."

The survey¹ polled 1,000 Australians and showed major gaps in first aid application, which could potentially cause more harm. For example, when polled about the first aid steps people would take if they were bitten by a snake, 43 per cent of respondents said they would use a tourniquet to stop circulation to the area – a very dangerous and potentially fatal practice.

Not only did the survey find people had the wrong information when it came to treatment, but also showed that bite and sting misconceptions run high, with 72 per cent of Australians believing dangerous 'old wives tales' to be true. One in three surveyed had heard snake venom could be sucked or cut from the bite - a practise which is extremely dangerous.

The survey also found:

- More than half (55%) of those surveyed would treat a box jellyfish sting with freshwater or alcohol—an incorrect first aid measure.
- Belief of traditional 'old wives' tales' is rampant with half (50%) of those surveyed believing urinating on a jellyfish sting will ease the pain and 31 per cent incorrectly believing you can suck the venom out of a snake bite.
- Snakes retain a fearsome reputation, with 54 per cent saying snakes were the biggest concern for overseas visitors when visiting an outback or rural area.

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bioCSL is the world's sole producer of antivenoms for Australia's most venomous snakes, spiders and marine animals; a community service it began in the 1950s. As part of its commitment to providing the community education about the unique venomous creatures that may cross the paths of Australians, bioCSL has introduced a new free smartphone app, Australian Bites & Stings: First Aid Guide to Australian Venomous Creatures, which hosts up-to-date first aid information.

According to Deputy Director of Emergency Medicine at Epworth Richmond Hospital, Dr Bill Nimo, 'If people are concerned about a bite or sting they should contact a healthcare professional immediately; however, if this is not an option and guidance is needed, a smartphone app, is a great way to have first aid advice immediately at hand.'

(1) Details: survey of 1,000 Australian Adults 18 years and older conducted by pureprofile in July 2013

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About bioCSL

bioCSL manufactures, markets and distributes seasonal and pandemic influenza vaccine worldwide. In Australia and New Zealand, bioCSL markets a comprehensive range of vaccines and pharmaceutical products. It also manufactures products of national significance for Australia, including antivenoms and Q-Fever vaccine, and supplies diagnostic reagents in the Australasia region. bioCSL's cold-chain logistics business ensures the integrity of bioCSL products, as well as those of our customers, as they are safely delivered across Australia. bioCSL is part of the CSL Group which is headquartered in Melbourne Australia. The CSL Group includes CSL Behring, CSL Plasma and bioCSL. With major facilities in Australia, Germany, Switzerland and the US, CSL has over 11,000 employees working in more than 25 countries.

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