



Snakebite Deaths in India

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Why in News

Recently, a study conducted by the **Centre for Global Health Research (CGHR)** at the University of Toronto (Canada), with Indian and United Kingdom as partners, has revealed that India recorded **1.2 million snakebite deaths** from 2000 to 2019 (i.e. an average of annual 58,000 deaths).

Earlier, in the largest ever such survey published in 2011 titled **‘Snakebite Mortality in India: A Nationally Representative Mortality Survey’**, estimated 46,000 annual snakebite deaths in India.

Key Points

- **Data Analysis:**
 - **Half** of all the snakebite deaths occurred **during the monsoon period** from June to September.
 - **Around 70% of deaths** occurred in limited, low altitude, rural areas of the following **States** – Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

The numbers for **annual snakebite deaths** were highest in the states of **Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar.**
 - The snakebite deaths occurred mostly in rural areas (97%), were more common in males (59%) than females (41%), and peaked at ages 15-29 years (25%).
 - The overall lifetime risk of being killed by snakebite is about **1 in 250**, but in some areas, the lifetime risk reaches 1 in 100.
 - It also indicated that most of the **envenomation** (the process by which venom is injected by the bite or sting of a venomous animal) was by **Russell’s vipers** followed by **Kraits and Cobras.**

- **Solutions:**

- **Immediate Action:** As India has tremendous snakebite burden and the **World Health Organization (WHO)** recognises snakebite as a top-priority **Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD)**, there is a need for immediate action.
- **Snake Safe Harvest Practices:** The primary victims of snakebites are rural farmers and their families. Targeting certain areas and educating people with simple methods such as ‘snake-safe’ harvest practices — **using rubber boots and gloves, mosquito nets and rechargeable torches (or mobile phone flashlights)** — could reduce the risk of snakebites.
- **Snake Species Database:** Habitat details, clear photographs and geographical distribution in the form of snake database would help in **the identification of the venomous and nonvenomous snake species.**
- **Anti-Venom:** India has sufficient capacity to manufacture large volumes of anti-venom. However, **Indian anti-venoms neutralise venom from only spectacled cobra, common krait, Russell’s viper and saw-scaled viper**, whereas there are **12 other snake species causing fatal bites** that are not covered by current anti-venoms.

Antivenoms are the medicines produced from **antibodies** made by animals to injected venoms.

It is given to stop snake venom from binding to tissues and causing serious blood, tissue, or nervous system problems.

Source: TH