

Health Action International Launches Programme to Improve Snakebite Situation in Kenya

Media Backgrounder | 23 November, 2017 | [Download PDF](#)

Free snakebite emergency information poster available in Kilifi County

NAIROBI—Health Action International (HAI) today launched a new research, education and advocacy programme in Kenya in an effort to reduce the number of snakebite deaths and injuries in the country.

“Taking into account thousands and thousands of snakebite victims in sub-Saharan Africa each year, this Programme is long-overdue,” said Benjamin Waldmann, Snakebite Programme Manager with HAI. “Available data suggests a high number of victims in Kenya, but due to under-reporting we don’t know the true extent of the snakebite problem here—it might be much greater than expected. This is why gathering solid evidence—in addition to educating and empowering civil society—is one of the three pillars of our Programme. Without solid data it’s difficult to make a case for snakebite victims on a governmental level.”

The HAI Snakebite Programme is being piloted in Kilifi County before being rolled out across Kenya.

The objectives of the Programme, which is being delivered in collaboration with the Watamu-based antivenom provider, James Ashe Antivenom Trust (JAAT), and the Global Snakebite Initiative (GSI), are to:

- Develop a much-needed base of evidence on snakebite incidence rates and the price, availability and affordability of antivenom in Kenya.
- Form a multi-stakeholder group, compiled of healthcare professionals, herpetologists, toxicologists, pharmacists and civil society representatives that will use the evidence base to provide health authorities with recommendations for effective snakebite management, particularly in rural communities.
- Equip Kenyan civil society with advocacy tools based on research evidence so they can press for greater action on snakebite.
- Raise awareness and knowledge about snakebite prevention, first aid and treatment in communities and among civil society and healthcare workers.

As a first step in raising awareness and knowledge about snakebite, HAI, JAAT and GSI are distributing a free information poster to communities in Kilifi County. The poster urges anyone bitten by any type of snake to seek immediate treatment at a health facility, or to

contact Royjan Taylor, HAI's Snakebite Programme Coordinator for Kenya with JAAT, in case of an emergency. In addition to providing relevant contact data, the poster identifies 28 common venomous snakes in Kenya.

"Educating people on the snakebite issue and improving health seeking behaviour are extremely important, particularly among people in rural communities who are mostly affected," said Taylor from his base in Watamu. "But hand in hand with that, we have to provide policy recommendations that enable government and healthcare leaders to improve access to effective snakebite treatment throughout Kenya."

The HAI Snakebite Programme is set up for pilot phase in Kilifi County until summer 2018. It will then be expanded across Kenya and into Uganda and Zambia.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- The free 'Common Venomous Snakes of Kenya' poster can be ordered by emailing snakes@bio-ken.com or writing to Bio-Ken Snake Farm, Watamu P.O. Box 3, Watamu, Kenya.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, snakebite causes approximately 32,000 deaths and 6,000 amputations every year. These figures are likely vastly underestimated because many snakebite cases go unreported.
- A critical shortage of safe, effective and affordable antivenom results in a heavy loss of life in Kenya and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.
- Snakebite victims from remote rural areas experience many difficulties, such as accessing a healthcare facility, the availability of ineffective traditional treatments, and receiving the right lifesaving antivenom.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Backgrounder: "[Evaluate, Educate, Empower: Health Action International Snakebite Programme - Kenya](#)"
- Action Plan: "[Preventing and Treating Snakebite in Resource-poor Settings: An Action Plan for Change](#)"

For interview requests and further information, please contact:

Birte Bogatz-Mander

Communications Advisor

Health Action International

T: +31 20 412 4523

M: +31 624 68 67 71

Email: birte@haiweb.org

About Health Action International

[Health Action International](#) is the only independent non-governmental organisation entirely dedicated to strengthening pharmaceutical policy to improve public health. Our staff and global network of members have expertise in virtually all areas of medicines policy, including the price, availability and affordability of medicines, clinical data transparency, intellectual property and pharmaceutical marketing. We pursue advocacy at the patient level and up to the highest levels of government through our 'official relations' status with the World Health Organization and respected relationship with the European Medicines Agency.

About the Global Snakebite Initiative

The [Global Snakebite Initiative](#) is a registered non-profit, charitable organisation, based in Australia, but with global membership. It was founded to give a voice to the forgotten victims of snakebite in poor, mostly rural, communities around the world and develop a collaborative framework to address the neglected global tragedy of snakebite envenoming. It aims to improve the understanding, prevention and treatment of snakebite injuries in developing countries and achieve significant improvements in outcomes for snakebite patients.

About the James Ashe Antivenom Trust

The James Ashe Antivenom Trust (JAAT) is a member of GSI. James Ashe (1925-2004) was one of Africa's greatest field herpetologists, and established the Bio-Ken Snake Farm at Watamu on the Kenyan coast in order to supply snake venoms to researchers, and for use in manufacturing antivenoms. JAAT was established in October 2004 following James' death, and it operates to make antivenoms available free-of-charge to victims of snakebite who would otherwise go untreated.