



Campbelltown Veterinary Hospital

Veterinary Surgeons

Gary Ashton B.V.Sc. Dip. Appl.Sc.

Lisa Henshaw B.V.Sc. MANZCVS (Behaviour)

www.campbelltownvet.com.au

email: ctownvet@bigpond.net.au

15 Chamberlain Street

(P.O. Box 663)

Phone: (02) 4626 4222

Fax: (02) 4628 2322

SNAKEBITE!!!!

Summertime is snake time. Most snakebites in Macarthur are either red bellied black snake or brown snake. If you suspect snake bite try to identify the snake, if possible bring any dead snake with your animal. Both dogs and cats are bitten commonly and remarkably cats are relatively resistant. Snakes are common urban animals as well as in rural areas.

Urgent attention is often needed. Some animals with perhaps multiple bites can be dead in twenty minutes. Envenomation is not a standard dose of venom, the amounts vary in volume and concentration with each bite and this makes the timing of signs variable also, usually muscle weakness and collapse. Keep your animal quiet and observe for signs. Contact your veterinarian.

Symptoms of snake bite may vary widely. Sudden onset commonly observed of clinical signs include: muscular weakness, incoordination of muscles or flaccid paralysis, dilated pupils, respiratory distress, trembling, salivation and vomiting, slower blood clotting, red blood cell breakdown and blood derivatives in the urine.

Treatment is expensive when antivenom is required, approximately \$880 for a single combined brown snake / black snake vial before any other requirements of hospital care, intravenous fluid therapy and other supportive medications as well as any blood tests so all up it usually costs an owner at least \$2000 to treat an uncomplicated case.

Early treatment if bitten provides the best result with some fit healthy animals able to go home in 24 hours. Older animals with other problems may need extended treatment. Usually it is younger fitter more inquisitive animals that we see bitten and this improves chances of success. Perhaps some of the older ones have learned to stay away from snakes.

If treatment is delayed say 24hrs or more after snakebite then antivenom is not always indicated as the venom is bound to the tissues. To survive 24hrs without treatment probably means a smallish dose of venom anyway and supportive treatment may be all that is needed, cats being particularly resilient. Supportive treatment may be required for approximately 3 to 7 days or more, but is variable.