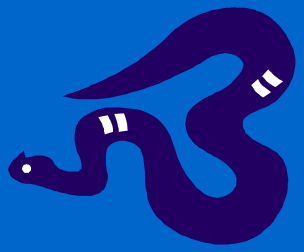
SNAKES OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA



Presented by:
A.M. Glassey, Ph.D.
Medical Entomology

Garter Snake

DESCRIPTION:

- Dorsal coloration brownish to olive with checkered black spots
- Yellow dorsal stripe
- Two light lateral stripes
- Will grow to 63 inches +
- Females weigh 1 - 1.5 lbs

SPECIFIC HABITATE REQUIREMENTS:

- Feeds primarily on small fishes, tadpoles, and frogs
- Required adequate during active season (*early-spring to mid-fall*) to provide food & cover
- Emergent vegetation such as cattails (*for cover*)
- Grassy banks / opening in vegetation for basking
- Area that does not flood during snakes winter dormant season

BREEDING:

- Season extends through March and April
- Females give birth to live young from late July through early September
- Brood size: 10 to 46 young with an average brood of 23
- Young typically double in size within first year
- Sexual maturity: 3 years for males & 5 years for females

Giant Garter Snake (*Thamnophis gigas)*
Status -- Federal: Threatened; California: Threatened

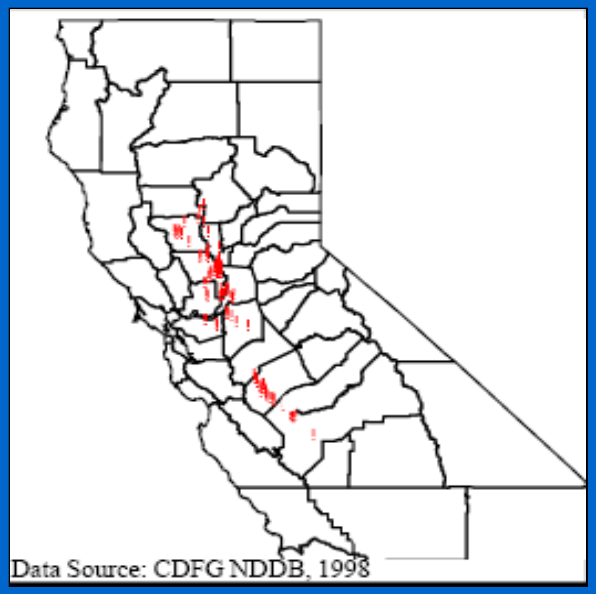
The Giant Garter snake is considered the largest of the garter snakes, with some adults reaching a length of more than 5 feet. Since most individuals are smaller, size may not be the best means of identification. The snake is usually dark brown to olive or tan; northern snakes are often darker-colored and have bolder stripes than San Joaquin Valley snakes. The snake has three stripes that can be pale, yellow, or even orange.

Along its side it has rows of black dots that may appear as a checkered or blotched pattern. Snakes emerging from dormancy are often muddy and
may appear to be a solid, dark color.

Habitat

The giant garter snake requires habitat that offers permanent or summer water with vegetative cover, dense populations of food organisms, and higher elevation uplands not subject to flooding.

Giant Garter Snake



During its active period (*March 1 through October 31*), the giant garter snake emerges in March or April and mates. It remains close to its denning habitat until May or June, then moves throughout the available aquatic habitat. It inhabits natural and artificial wetlands. It lives in rice fields, irrigation supply and drainage canals, freshwater marshes, sloughs, ponds, and other aquatic habitats. The snake uses grasses, weeds, cattails, tules, and other vegetation for basking, foraging and cover. It might also be seen on roads or in drains, check dams, culverts, rocks, fallen logs, debris piles, and other structures.

Food

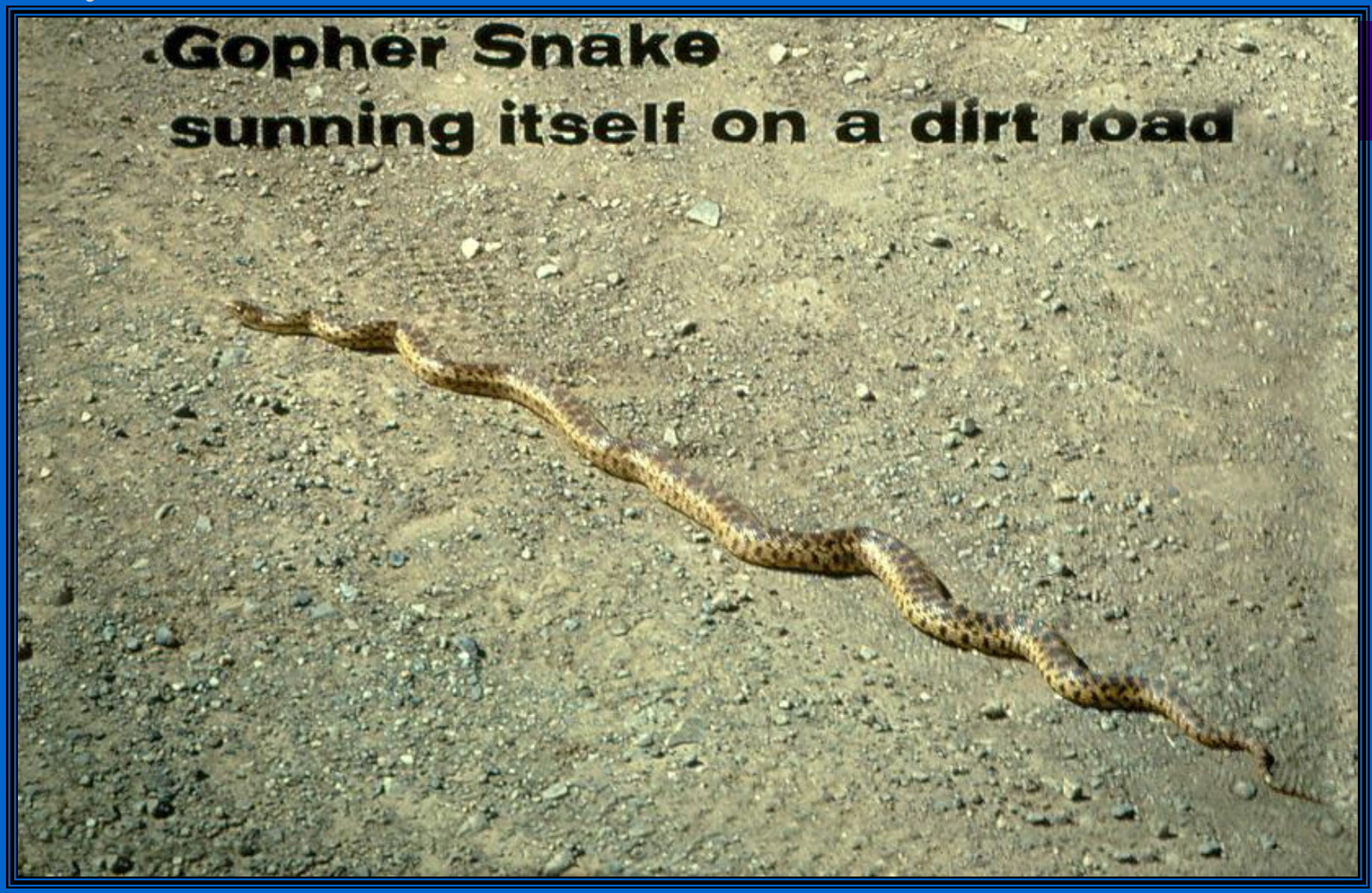
The snake feeds on tadpoles, frogs, small fish, and other small vertebrates, and may be drawn to receding wet areas where prey is concentrated.

Denning

During its dormant period (October 31 through March 1), it requires denning areas that remain above floodwaters. Snakes spend most of their dormant period in small mammal burrows located on elevated roads or in fields, railroad trestles, and riprapped ditch banks.

Range

Giant garter snakes can occur in suitable habitat, as described, throughout the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, including the following counties: Butte, Colusa, Contra Costa, Fresno, Glenn, Madera, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, Sutter and Yolo.

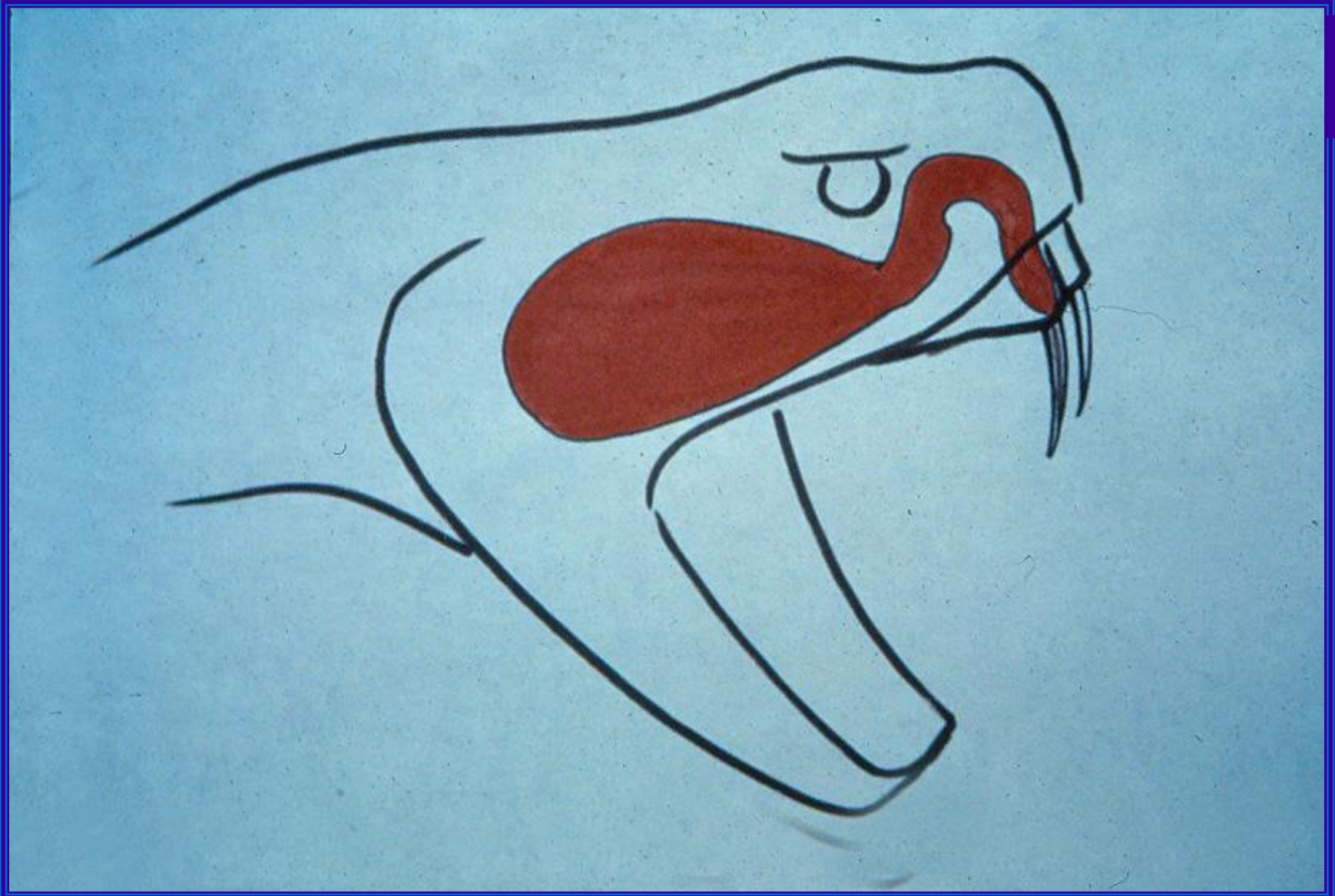

Gopher Snake
sunning itself on a dirt road

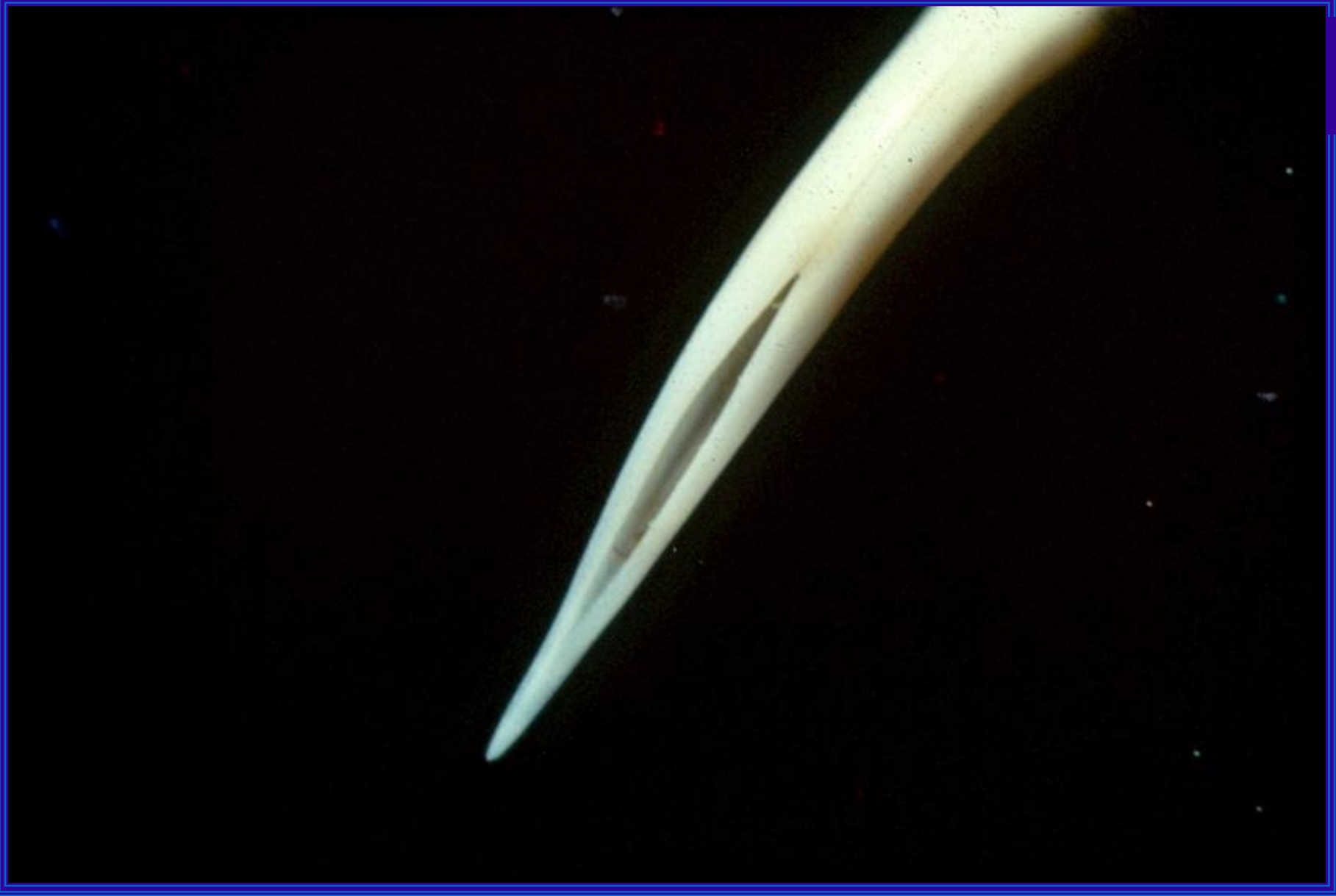
King Snake

GOPHER SNAKE

RATTLESNAKE

RATTLESNAKE





First Aid For Venomous Snake Bites

Current American Red Cross first aid for venomous snake bites includes:

1. Keep the patient calm
2. Remove tight fitting clothing, shoes, etc.
3. Remove Jewelry (rings, bracelets, etc.)
4. Keep bite below the level of the heart, if possible
5. Transport victims to nearest medical care facility
6. If the snake has been killed, and it can be done safely, bring the ***dead*** snake with you.

NOTE

DO *NOT* APPLY COLD OR ICE TO SNAKE BITES!!

AND

NEVER GIVE AN UNCONCIOUS PERSON ANYTHING BY MOUTH!