



CAN POTASSIUM PERMANGANATE BE A FIRST AID HELP BY POISONOUS SNAKEBITES?

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A couple of years ago I was visiting Harm Boerma in Groningen. He legally keeps poisonous snakes for over 30 years. During this visit I got lots of documentation on snakebites and their endings. He also told me about his visits to Australia searching for snakes. He even has travelled through Africa several months searching for them. During his tour around America he visited Apache Junction. There he got to know the Indian culture and this cooled his snake-love somewhat. Harm consented me that his age was not a positive aspect as it only increased the risks if he got bitten.

By this I got curious about what he took with him on a trip for safety in case he got bitten. What can happen if a poisonous snake somewhere in the wild bites you? The problems you'll be facing differ from the problems in Holland when there's always an ambulance and a hospital nearby. I inquired about the sera he took with him during his various trips around the world.

That should have been a problem, travelling alone. Organised trips by e.g. a zoo or institute are always perfectly equipped for these purposes. His answer kind of stunned me and from this amazement this contribution rose.


On his first trip to Australia he made himself a stick about 2 metres long with a leather belt at the end. He also showed me an ampoule of 1 ml potassium permanganate as a 5% solution of 2 ml of the Australian

reptile zoo. He told me that they gave him this as a first aid solution in case of any accident in the wild. This ampoule should then be poured in the wound or injected to crystallise the poison. This was to give you some time to get to a hospital. In case of a bite by a Taipan or a death adder he guessed he would certainly need it.

High temperatures, as in Australia, are known to have a bad effect on sera. These sera should always be stored cool. If it should be dry stored sera, you would need injection liquid to be able to administer it. And even with the ampoules, shaking shortens its life and it can only be used when it is still a totally clear liquid. All these conditions could not be met by Harm at that time and so he did put his trust in the ampoule of potassium permanganate. Luckily he never had to use it.

At the end of my visit Harm offered me his stick and his ampoule, cause I keep various species of poisonous snakes at home. At that time I did not have any sera at home myself. It felt good to have the ampoule but also a lot of questions rose because of its content. At home I decided to visit my doctor and ask him his opinion. He told me it might work but it was a poison itself. After usage you should always need an operation to get rid of the formed crystal. He also told me that this chemical can be easily and cheap obtained at any pharmacy or drugstore.

In the books I could only find that you should not use this chemical. I cannot find anything about how it



works or what it does or even the danger attached to usage. Why is it made in Australia and sold by the Australian Reptile Parc? Is there anyone who knows some more?

If potassium permanganate can be used it is a very cheap first aid help. I'm looking forward to your reactions.

***Translated by Henriëtte Bakker
Corrections by Mark Wootten***

