

News Release

Contact: Denise Rendina

For Immediate Release

239.262.5409 x 122 / denise@napleszoo.com

Naples Zoo and Venomous Safety

Naples, FL –To help save lives when people are injured by venomous creatures, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) have launched the Online Antivenom Index (National Press Release follows). This new resource will provide timely information with its lifesaving implications.

In Florida, residents and visitors share the state with an impressive array of native animals including 45 species of snakes. Because 6 of those species are venomous, Naples Zoo educates the public about venomous and non-venomous snakes at daily on-site Zoo shows and through specialized seminars. Because Naples Zoo currently houses only native venomous snakes and has an appropriately prepared hospital nearby, Naples Zoo does not maintain a separate supply of antivenoms.

Every day, *Serpents: Fangs or Fiction* provides Naples Zoo visitors the opportunity to discover the world of reptiles including some of Florida's venomous snakes. Guests safely get an up close view through a live video camera broadcasting to monitors in the Safari Canyon theater. They can also see quick video clips highlighting fascinating behaviors not easily seen outside the wild. Zoo staff educate visitors about the important role that reptiles play in the ecosystem and how to live in harmony with these beneficial creatures.

Zoo experts also reach out to the community during specialized venomous safety programs featuring both venomous and non-venomous snakes. Zoo Director David Tetzlaff and Curator of Reptiles Jeff Carter and other zoo staff have made these presentations for groups from Florida Power & Light, Rookery Bay, Naples Preserve, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and others. Resources from these presentations are available at www.napleszoo.com/snakes.

High resolution image of David Tetzlaff and copperhead available by request to denise@napleszoo.com



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*Contacts: Kris Vehrs, AZA 301 562 0777 extension 229
Ginny Geib, Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center
(520) 626-3389*

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ZOOS, AQUARIUMS AND POISON CENTERS DEBUT NEW WEB-BASED ANTIVENOM INDEX TO SPEED ANTIDOTE DELIVERY

Site uses technology to speed up treatment for bite victims

SILVER SPRING, MD – A venomous snakebite can create a life-threatening situation. Often, the proper treatment requires the use of a specific antidote, called an antivenom, and the speed with which it can be obtained and administered can mean the difference between life and death. Approximately 3,000 native and 50 non-native (exotic) bites from venomous snakes are reported to U.S. poison centers each year. When the situation involves an exotic species, determining the appropriate antivenom, locating a supply, and getting it to the patient become particularly difficult challenges.

A collaborative effort by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) uses new technologies to get treatment to the patient faster. Launched today, the Online Antivenom Index is a web-based database allowing doctors, poison control centers and hospitals to access up-to-date information about antivenom stocked at AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums. In addition, the Antivenom Index offers information about what antivenom to use and allows coordination of delivery to the patient.

Antivenom (also referred to as antivenin) is a biological product used to provide medical treatment for venomous bites and stings. Similar to a vaccine, antivenom introduces antibodies into the victim reducing the effect of the venom. Many AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums that work with venomous species maintain supplies of antivenom to treat animal care staff who may accidentally get bitten while caring for these species. In addition, AZA members support their communities by making these stores available to hospitals and doctors when private citizens encounter and are bitten by venomous reptiles.

The original Antivenom Index, also a collaborative effort by the AZA and the AAPCC, was published at irregular intervals in hard copy for the past 23 years. "Over the years, it became increasingly obvious that in order for the Index to remain a viable tool it needed an immediately available format that can continually be updated," said Leslie Boyer, M.D., director of the Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center at the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy. She is the lead investigator under a poison center stabilization and enhancement grant (Grant 5H4BMC00938) provided in 2004 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (DHHS/HRSA). "The electronic Index is the most efficient way for the AZA and the AAPCC to quickly collaborate to treat venomous snakebites," she said.

“The new Index can be life-saving,” said Jim Maddy, president and CEO of the AZA. “While the primary purpose of the Index is to assist personnel at a poison control center to locate the appropriate antivenom in the case of a snakebite, the Index also will assist zoo and aquarium staff in selecting and importing appropriate antivenoms for treatment of bites and stings by animals in their care.”

“The AZA and the AAPCC recognize that most exotic snakebites occur among private collectors, who rarely, if ever, have their own antivenom. When this occurs, the only readily available supply is from zoo or aquarium stocks,” said Steven Seifert, M.D., a participant in the Antivenom Index development team, member of the AAPCC board of directors, and the medical director of the Nebraska Regional Poison Center.

The online Antivenom Index, at www.aza.org/ai/, is password-protected and may be accessed only by AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums to update their stocking information or by any poison center when treatment is needed.

"AZA-accredited organizations have expert animal care staff who manage a range of exotic reptiles," said Don Boyer, AZA Antivenom Index chair and curator of herpetology at the San Diego Zoo. "The Index is an important tool that provides current information about appropriate antivenoms on the rare occasions when a snakebite occurs."

This Index is not intended as a key to the identification of venomous species. In the event of an envenomation (injection of a poisonous material by sting, spine, bite, or other similar means), the animal species involved must first be correctly identified. An expert in the field should be consulted to confirm identification. “The Index is also not intended to replace the advice of the attending physician, but rather to serve as a reference,” said Maddy. “It is the responsibility of the designated senior zoo or aquarium staff to develop and maintain a working relationship with the physicians and hospitals that would manage venomous snakebites for their institution.”

The listing of venomous species in this Index is extensive, but not exhaustive. “It does cover virtually all of the venomous reptiles native to the United States or commonly held in zoos and aquariums or private collections as well as all of the animals for which we have confirmation that an antivenom is produced,” said Seifert. The breadth of the repositories covers primarily snakes, one fish, and a variety of invertebrate species.

Even if antivenom is manufactured for a particular species, there is no guarantee that the antivenom is available in North American institutions. If no zoo or aquarium currently has any specimens of a particular snake, the specific antivenom may not be available. In those instances, the Index provides information on possible alternative antivenoms as well as adjunctive therapies that may be useful.

ABOUT AAPCC

The American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) is a private nongovernmental association representing the country's 61 Poison Control Centers and their staff and affiliated toxicologists. It manages the only poisoning surveillance database in the United States, which contains information regarding calls to the toll-free Poison Help hotline, 1-800-222-1222. The 24-hour Poison Help hotline is continuously staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers. Poison centers also engage in public and professional educational outreach, poison prevention efforts, and provide expert consultants to governments, health systems, healthcare providers, industry, and the media.

ABOUT AZA

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, science, and recreation. Look for the AZA logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. With its more than 200 accredited members, the AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation, and your link to helping animals in their native habitats.