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Exotic Envenomation by an African Bush Viper: A Case Report

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Photo courtesy of Khara Geder Smith

Abstract

Atheris squamigera is an African venomous snake. US envenomation is exceedingly rare with only two previous cases reported. A 26-year-old exotic pet owner developed pain and swelling on his left foot following an *Atheris squamigera* bite.

Case Report

A 26-year-old man with no past medical history presented to the Emergency Department (ED) for evaluation of left foot pain and swelling following a snakebite. While transferring an *Atheris squamigera* snake between containers, he was bitten twice on the dorsum of his left foot. In the ED, vital signs were: BP 112/80 mmHg, HR 77 bpm, T 98.5°F, RR 16 bpm, O₂ saturation 99%. Physical exam showed puncture wounds on dorsum of left foot with surrounding erythema, ecchymosis and edema. Abnormal labs included: initial D-dimer 1.06 [<0.50 ug/mL], WBC 12.58 [4.0-10.5 K/cmm], absolute neutrophils 9.15 [1.8-7.8 K/cmm], fibrinogen 121 [180-500 mg/dL] and subsequent D-dimer > 20 [<0.50 ug/mL]. Additional laboratory testing was within normal limits. After consultation with a medical toxicologist, he was transferred to a tertiary care hospital. The physician and primary investigator of Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Venom One were consulted to obtain antivenom if needed. Signs and symptoms remained local and mild not requiring antivenom, and the patient was discharged on Hospital Day 2.

Discussion

The findings of swelling, ecchymosis, erythema, in addition to the mild lab abnormalities, indicated the patient was envenomated. An early indicator of envenomation is neutrophilic leukocytosis. Currently, no specific antivenom exists, but utilization of antivenoms of similar species has been described. The patient's mild presentation did not require antivenom administration, but access to antivenom was established if the envenomation progressed. Two US *Atheris squamigera* envenomations have been reported—only one required antivenom.

Conclusion

Physicians must be aware of exotic snake bites and the possibility of procuring antivenoms for severe envenomation.