

250 die of snakebite in 3 weeks as acute scarcity of anti-venom persists

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Two hundred and fifty victims of snake bite have died in the last three weeks in Plateau and Gombe States, following an acute scarcity of snake anti-venom drugs in the country.

The figure represents the number of confirmed deaths from three snake treatment centres - General Hospital, Kaltungo, Ali Mega Pharmacy, Gombe and Comprehensive Medical Centre, Zamko, Plateau State.

A correspondent of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), who visited the three medical outfits, met other victims in critical situations, with some of them left on bare floors as the doctors said they were helpless without the anti-venom.

NAN reports that the snake anti-venom drugs - Echitab Plus ICP polyvalent and Echitab G monovalent - had not been supplied to the country since August, throwing the treatment centres into crisis after the last vials were used up in the first week of October.

Echitab Plus ICP, produced at Instituto Clodomiro Picado, University of Costa Rica, treats bites from all venomous snakes in Nigeria, while Echitab G, produced by Micropharm Ltd, United Kingdom, is solely for carpet viper bites.

Medics, who spoke with NAN at the three treatment centres, said that the cases of snake bites were usually very common during the harvest season.

“We receive an average of 50 victims every day. Some arrive here in very critical conditions and we just have to watch them die because we are helpless,” Abubakar Abdullahi Aliyu, Managing Director, Aliyu Mega Pharmacy, told NAN in Gombe.

He said that more than 70 victims had died in the last three weeks following the lack of anti-venom to treat them, adding that some came from Adamawa, Taraba, Bauchi, Borno and Plateau States.

Reacting to the non-availability of the snake anti-venom drug, Dr. Nandul Durfa, Managing Director, Echitab Study Group, Representative of the two companies that produce the anti-snake-venom drug in Nigeria, blamed the situation on the “late placement of order for its production”.

“It is very sad that there is a sudden shortage that culminated in many deaths. The drought is due to technical hitches in the production chain which is being looked into, to prevent a recurrence.”