

ROUTINE ANTIBIOTIC THERAPY HAS NO VALUE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE LOCAL INFLAMMATORY SWELLING IN VENOMOUS SNAKEBITES: RESULTS OF A RANDOMISED, DOUBLE BLIND, AND PLACEBO-CONTROLLED STUDY

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Snakes bites very often produce local effects at the site of the bite, varying from mild swelling to severe necrosis. The pathogenesis could be due to either cytotoxin-mediated inflammation or infection caused by bacterial contamination from the oral flora of snakes. Antibiotics are commonly used to manage the local manifestations.

A prospective, double blind, randomised, placebo-controlled study was designed to evaluate the value of routine antibiotic therapy in the management of the local swelling. One hundred and forty four patients admitted to the General Hospital, Anuradhapura, with envenoming and local swelling in the leg were randomised to receive either penicillin and metronidazole (Group A- Test group) or placebo (Group B- controls) on the day of admission. Benzyl penicillin 2 mega units intravenously 6 hourly and metronidazole 500 mg. by intravenous infusion 8 hourly, for 5 days, from the first day of the bite were given to the test group. Circumference difference between the affected limb and the normal limb, length of the swelling, and the physical characteristics of the local swelling were compared. The Test group had 69 patients and the control group 75 subjects. The mean circumference difference (MCD) of the legs between two groups showed no significant difference for 4days ($P > 0.05$), except at the site of the bite on the third day when the control group showed a significant improvement ($p = 0.02$). There was no significant difference in the length of the local swelling or the score of physical characteristics between the two groups ($P > 0.05$). The proportions of recovery of the local swelling on the 4th and 5th days had no significant difference ($P > 0.05$).

Routine use of antibiotics (penicillin and metronidazole) has no value in reducing the local inflammatory swelling in venomous snakebites. Therefore, this practice should be discouraged.