

WHO Guidelines for the
Production Control
and Regulation of
**Snake Antivenom
Immunoglobulins**



World Health
Organization

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1 INTRODUCTION

The unavailability of effective snake antivenom immunoglobulins (antivenoms) to treat the specific types of snakebite envenomings encountered in various regions of the world has become a critical health issue at global level. The crisis has reached its greatest intensity in sub-Saharan Africa, but other regions, such as south-east Asia, are also suffering from a lack of effective and affordable products.

The complexity of the production of antivenoms, in particular the importance of preparing appropriate snake venom mixtures for the production of hyperimmune plasma (the source of antivenom immunoglobulins), the decreasing number of producers and the fragility of the production systems in developing countries further jeopardize the availability of effective antivenoms in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America. Most of the remaining current producers are located in countries where the application of quality and safety standards needs to be improved.

In October 2005, the WHO Expert Committee on Biological Standardization (ECBS) recognized the extent of the problem and asked the WHO Secretariat to support and strengthen world capacity to ensure long-term and sufficient supply of safe and efficient antivenoms. In March 2007, snake antivenom immunoglobulins were included in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines (*1*), acknowledging their role in a primary health care system.

Urgent measures are needed to support the design of immunizing snake venom mixtures that can be used to make the right polyspecific antivenoms for various geographical areas of the world. Sustainable availability of effective and safe antivenom immunoglobulins should be ensured and production systems for these effective treatments should be strengthened at global level. Meaningful preclinical assessment of the neutralizing capacity of snake antivenom immunoglobulins needs to be done before these products are used in humans and medicines regulatory authorities should enforce the licensing of these products before they are used in the population.

The present “WHO Guidelines for the production, control and regulation of snake antivenoms immunoglobulins” were developed in response to the above-mentioned needs. These Guidelines cover all the steps involved in the production, control and regulation of venoms and antivenoms, as well as an Appendix providing detailed information about the distributions of the most important snake venoms for use in antivenoms preparation in each country, territory or geographical area. It is hoped that this document, by covering comprehensively the current existing experience in the manufacture, preclinical and clinical assessment of these products will serve as a guide to national control authorities and manufacturers in the support of worldwide production of these essential medicines. The production of snake antivenoms following good manufacturing practices should be the aim of all countries involved in the manufacture of these life-saving biological products.

In addition to the need to produce appropriate antivenoms, other issues that need to be addressed include ensuring that antivenoms are appropriately used and that outcomes for envenomed patients are improved. This will entail availability of antivenoms and appropriate distribution policies, affordability of envenoming treatment and training of health workers to allow safe and effective use of antivenoms and effective management of snakebite envenomings. These important issues are beyond the scope of this document and will not be further addressed specifically here, but should be considered as vital components in the care pathway for envenoming.

2 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS USED

The definitions given below apply to the terms used in these Guidelines. They may have different meanings in other contexts.

Antivenoms (also called antivenins)

A purified fraction of immunoglobulins or immunoglobulin fragments fractionated from the plasma of animals that have been immunized against a snake venom or a snake venom mixture.

Apheresis

Procedure whereby blood is removed from the donor, separated by physical means into components and one or more of them returned to the donor.

Batch

A defined quantity of starting material or product manufactured in a single process or series of processes so that it is expected to be homogeneous.

Batch records

All documents associated with the manufacture of a batch of bulk product or finished product. They provide a history of each batch of product and of all circumstances pertinent to the quality of the final product.

Blood collection

A procedure whereby a single donation of blood is collected in an anticoagulant and/or stabilizing solution, under conditions designed to minimize microbiological contamination of the resulting donation.

Bulk product

Any product that has completed all processing stages up to, but not including, aseptic filling and final packaging.

Clean area

An area with defined environmental control of particulate and microbial contamination, constructed and used in such a way as to reduce the introduction, generation, and retention of contaminants within the area.

Combined antivenoms

Antivenoms directed against several venoms, prepared by mixing different monospecific plasma prior to the plasma fractionation process, or purified monospecific antivenom fractions prior to the aseptic filling stage.

Contamination

The undesired introduction of impurities of a microbiological or chemical nature, or of foreign matter, into or on to a starting material or intermediate during production, sampling, packaging, or repackaging, storage or transport.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

An international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

Cross-contamination

Contamination of a starting material, intermediate product or finished product with another starting material or product during production.

Cross-neutralization

The ability of an antivenom raised against a venom, or a group of venoms, to react and neutralize the toxic effects of the venom of a related species not included in the immunizing mixture.

Desiccation

A storage process where venoms are dehydrated under vacuum in the presence of calcium salts or phosphoric acid.

EIA

Enzyme immunoassay.

Envenoming

Process by which venom is injected into a human by the bite of a poisonous snake, leading to pathological manifestations (also called envenomation).

Fab

A monovalent immunoglobulin fragment resulting from the proteolytic digestion of immunoglobulins by papain.

F(ab')₂

A bivalent immunoglobulin fragment resulting from the proteolytic digestion of immunoglobulins by pepsin.

Fractionation

Large-scale process by which animal plasma is separated to isolate the immunoglobulin fraction, that is further processed for therapeutic use or may be subjected to digestion with pepsin or papain to generate immunoglobulin fragments. The term fractionation is generally used to describe a sequence of processes, generally including plasma protein precipitation and/or chromatography, ultrafiltration and filtration steps.

Freund complete adjuvant (FCA)

An adjuvant that may be used in the immunization process of animals to enhance the immune response to venoms. It is composed of mineral oil, an emulsifier and inactivated *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.

Freund incomplete adjuvant (FIA)

An adjuvant that may be used in the immunization process of animals to enhance the immune response to venoms. It is composed of mineral oil and an emulsifier.

Good manufacturing practices (GMP)

That part of quality assurance which ensures that products are consistently produced and controlled to the quality standards appropriate to their intended use and as required by the marketing authorization or product specification. It is concerned with both production and quality control.

HPLC

High-performance liquid chromatography.

IgG

Immunoglobulin G.

IgM

Immunoglobulin M.

Immunization process

A process by which an animal is injected with venom(s) to produce a long-lasting and high-titre antibody response against the lethal and other deleterious components in the immunogen.

Immunoglobulin

Antibody molecule generated by immunizing an animal (most often a horse) against a snake venom or a snake venom mixture. Immunoglobulin G (IgG) is the most abundant immunoglobulin fraction.

In-process control

Checks performed during production to monitor and, if necessary, to adjust the process to ensure that the antivenom conforms to specifications. The control of the environment or equipment may also be regarded as part of in-process control.

Manufacture

All operations of purchase of materials and products, production, quality control, release, storage and distribution of snake antivenom immunoglobulins, and the related controls.

Median effective dose (or effective dose 50%) (ED₅₀)

The quantity of antivenom that protects 50% of test animals injected with a number of LD₅₀ of venom.

Median lethal dose or lethal dose 50% (LD₅₀)

The quantity of snake venoms, injected intravenously or intraperitoneally, that leads to the death of 50% of the animals in a group after an established period of time (usually 24–48 hrs).

Milking

The process of collecting venom from live snakes.

Monospecific antivenom

Defines antivenoms that are limited in use to a single species of venomous snake or to a few closely related species whose venoms show clinically effective cross-neutralization with the antivenom. The term “monovalent” is often used and has the same meaning.

M_r

Relative molecular mass.

Nanofilter

Filters, most typically with effective pore sizes of 50 nm or below, designed to remove viruses from protein solutions.

National regulatory authority (NRA)

WHO terminology to refer to national medicines regulatory authorities. Such authorities promulgate medicine regulations and enforce them.

Plasma

The liquid portion remaining after separation of the cellular elements from blood collected in a receptacle containing an anticoagulant, or separated by continuous filtration or centrifugation of anticoagulated blood in an apheresis procedure.

Plasmapheresis

Procedure in which whole blood is removed from the donor, the plasma is separated from the cellular elements by sedimentation, filtration, or centrifugation, and at least the red blood cells are returned to the donor.

Polyspecific antivenom

Defines antivenoms that are obtained by fractionating the plasma from animals immunized by a mixture of venoms from several species of venomous snakes. The term “polyvalent” is often used and has the same meaning.

Prion

A particle of protein that is thought to be able to self-replicate and to be the agent of infection in a variety of diseases of the nervous system, such as mad cow disease and other transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE). It is generally believed not to contain nucleic acid.

Production

All operations involved in the preparation of snake antivenom immunoglobulins, from preparation of venoms, immunization of animals, collection of blood or plasma, processing, packaging and labeling, to its completion as a finished product.

Quarantine

A period of enforced isolation and observation typically to contain the spread of an infectious disease among animals. The same terminology applies to the period of isolation used to perform quality control of plasma prior to fractionation, or of antivenom immunoglobulins prior to release and distribution.

SDS–PAGE

Sodium dodecyl sulfate–polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis.

Serum

A liquid portion remaining after clotting of the blood. Serum has a composition similar to plasma (including the immunoglobulins) apart from fibrinogen and other coagulation factors which constitute the fibrin clot.

Standard operating procedure (SOP)

An authorized written procedure giving instructions for performing operations not necessarily specific to a given product or material (e.g. equipment operation, maintenance and cleaning; validation; cleaning of premises and environmental control; sampling and inspection). Certain SOPs may be used to supplement product-specific master and batch production documentation.

Toxin

A toxic substance, especially a protein, which is produced by living cells or organisms and is capable of causing disease when introduced into the body tissues. It is often also capable of inducing neutralizing antibodies or antitoxins.

Traceability

Ability to trace each individual snake, venom, immunized animal, or unit of blood or plasma used in the production of an antivenom immunoglobulin with the final fractionated batch. The term is used to describe forward and reverse tracing.

TSE

Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy.

Validation

Action of proving, in accordance with the principles of good manufacturing practice, that any procedure, process, equipment, material, activity, or system actually leads to the expected results.

Venom

The toxic secretion of a specialized venom gland which, in the case of snakes, is delivered through the fangs and provokes deleterious effects. Venoms usually comprise many different protein components of variable structure and toxicity.

Viral inactivation

A process of enhancing viral safety in which viruses are intentionally “killed”.

Viral reduction

A process of enhancing viral safety in which viruses are inactivated and/or removed.

Viral removal

A process of enhancing viral safety by partitioning viruses from the protein(s) of interest.

3 GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Snake antivenom immunoglobulins (antivenoms) are the only specific treatment for envenoming by snakebites. They are produced by the fractionation of plasma usually obtained from large domestic animals hyper-immunized against relevant venoms. Important but infrequently used antivenoms may be prepared in small animals. When injected into an envenomed human patient, antivenom will neutralize any of the venoms used in its production, and in some instances will also neutralize venoms from closely related species.

3.1 Historical background

Shortly after the identification of diphtheria and tetanus toxins, von Behring and Kitasato reported the antitoxic properties of the serum of animals immunized against diphtheria or tetanus toxins and suggested the use of antisera for the treatment of these diseases (2). In 1894, von Behring diphtheria antitoxin was first successfully administered by Roux to save children suffering from severe diphtheria. Thus, serum therapy was born and the antitoxin was manufactured by Burroughs Wellcome in the United Kingdom. The same year, Phisalix and Bertrand (3) and Calmette (4) simultaneously, but independently, presented during the same session of the same meeting their observations on the antitoxic properties of the serum of rabbits and guinea-pigs immunized against cobra and viper venoms, respectively. Immediately after his discovery of “antivenin serum-therapy”, Albert Calmette was actively involved in proving its efficacy in the treatment of human envenoming. The first horse-derived antivenom sera that he prepared were already in clinical use in 1895 by Haffkine in India and by Lépinay in Viet Nam. The latter reported the first successful use of antivenin serum therapy in patients in 1896 (5).

3.2 The use of serum versus plasma as source material

Historically, the pioneers Calmette, Vital Brazil and others, used serum separated from the blood of hyperimmunized horses for the preparation of antivenom (“antivenin serum-therapy”). Later, antibodies (immunoglobulins) were demonstrated to be the active molecules responsible for the therapeutic action of “antivenom serum”. Subsequently, immunoglobulins, or immunoglobulin fragments ($F(ab')_2$), purified from serum were used instead of crude serum (6, 7).

Nowadays, plasmapheresis, whereby erythrocytes are re-injected into the donor animal within 24 hours of blood collection, is commonly employed to reduce anaemia in the hyperimmunized animal that donates the plasma. Accordingly, it is almost exclusively, plasma rather than serum that is used as the starting material for the extraction of the immunoglobulin or its fragments (8–10). Thus “snake antivenom immunoglobulin” is the preferred term, rather than “anti-snakebite serum” or “antiserum” which are no longer accurate.

3.3 Antivenom purification methods and product safety

Purification methods were introduced to reduce the frequency of antivenom reactions by removing the Fc fragment from IgG, thus preventing complement activation and perhaps reducing the intensity of immune-complex formation responsible for late antivenom reactions (serum sickness). For 60–70 years, immunoglobulin $F(ab')_2$ fragments have been widely used. However, antivenom protein aggregation, and not Fc-mediated complement activation, was increasingly identified as a major cause of antivenom reactions. Thus, a critical issue in antivenom safety probably lies in the physicochemical characteristics of antivenoms and not exclusively in the type of neutralizing molecules constituting the active substance. It is also important to ensure that the current methodologies to produce antivenoms provide a sufficient margin of safety with regard to the risk of transmission of zoonosis.

3.4 Pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of antivenoms

Rapid elimination of some therapeutic antivenoms (e.g. when Fab fragments are used) has led to recurrence of envenoming in patients. However, the choice of preparing specific IgG or fragments appears to depend on the size and toxicokinetics of the principal toxin(s) of the venoms. Large relative molecular mass (M_r) bivalent antibodies (IgG and $F(ab')_2$ fragments) may be effective for the complete and prolonged neutralization of intravascular toxins (e.g. procoagulant enzymes) which have a long half-life in envenomed patients, whereas low M_r and monovalent IgG fragments such as Fab may be more appropriate against low-molecular-mass neurotoxins which are rapidly distributed to their tissue targets and are rapidly eliminated from the patient's body (11).

3.5 Need for national and regional reference venom preparations

Antivenom production is technically demanding. The need to design appropriate polyspecific antivenoms is supported by the difference in venom composition among venomous animals, associated with the fact that:

- many countries can be inhabited by several medically important species; and
- in many circumstances there is no distinctive clinical syndrome to direct the use of monospecific antivenoms.

However, similarities in the venom toxins of closely related venomous species may result in cross-neutralization, thus reducing the number of venoms required for the preparation of polyspecific antivenoms. Cross-neutralization should be tested in animal models and ideally by clinical studies in envenomed patients. Preclinical testing of antivenoms against medically important venoms present in each geographical region or country is a prerequisite for product licences and batch approval, and should always precede clinical use in envenomed patients. This requires efforts by manufacturers and/or regulators to establish regional or national reference venom preparations that can be used to test the neutralization capacity of antivenoms. The national control laboratory of the country where the antivenom will be used, or the manufacturer seeking a licence for the antivenom, should perform such preclinical testing using reference venom preparations relevant to the country or the geographical area.

4 EPIDEMIOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The incidence of snakebites in different parts of the world and the recognition of the particular species of greatest medical importance is fundamental to the appropriate design of monospecific and polyspecific antivenoms in countries and regions. Up-to-date knowledge is therefore highly relevant to antivenom manufacturers and regulators, especially for the selection of the most appropriate venoms, or venom mixtures, to be used in the production and quality control of antivenoms.

4.1 Global burden of snakebites

Envenoming and deaths resulting from snakebites are a particularly important public health problem in rural tropical areas of Africa, Asia, Latin America and New Guinea (12). Agricultural workers and children are the most affected groups. Epidemiological assessment of the true incidence of global mortality and morbidity from snakebite envenomings has been hindered by several well recognized problems (13, 14). Snakebite envenomings and associated mortality are under-reported because many victims (20–70% in some studies) do not seek treatment in government dispensaries or hospitals and hence are not recorded. This occurs because medical

posts in regions of high incidence are unable to keep accurate records and because death certification of snakebite is often imprecise (15, 16). Correctly designed population surveys, in which questionnaires are distributed to randomly selected households in demographically well-defined areas, are the only reliable method for estimating the true burden of snakebites in rural areas. The results of the few such surveys that have been performed have shown surprisingly high rates of bites, deaths and permanent sequelae of envenoming (15, 17–20). However, because of the heterogeneity of snakebite incidence within countries, the results of surveys of local areas cannot be extrapolated to give total national values. Most of the available data suffer from these deficiencies and, in general, should be regarded as underestimates and approximations. Published estimates of global burden suggest a range from a minimum of 421 000 envenomings and 20 000 deaths up to as high as 2.5 million cases and over 100 000 deaths each year (14, 21). In addition, the number of people left with permanent sequelae as a result of these envenomings is likely to be higher than the number of fatalities (12). As already identified, most of the estimated burden of snakebite is from sub-Saharan Africa, south and south-east Asia and central and south America.

The current literature on snakebite epidemiology highlights the inadequacy of the available data on this neglected tropical disease. There is clearly a need to improve reporting and record-keeping of venomous bites in health facilities, to support high-quality epidemiological studies of snakebite in different regions, and to improve the training of medical personnel. Wherever possible, recording the species that caused the bite as well as death or injury would greatly assist in documenting which species are of clinical significance in individual countries. Making venomous bites notifiable and fully implementing the use of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10th Revision (22) in official death certification (e.g. T 63.0 snake venom) would further help to determine the burden of snakebite more accurately.

4.2 Main recommendations

In most parts of the world, snakebites are under-reported and in some parts are completely unreported. This deficiency in surveillance and the paucity of properly designed epidemiological studies explain why the impact of this important public health problem has remained for so long unrecognized and neglected.

National health authorities should be encouraged to improve the scope and precision of their epidemiological surveillance of this disease by:

- **improving the training of all medical personnel so that they are more aware of the local causes, manifestations and treatment of venomous bites;**
- **making venomous bites notifiable diseases;**
- **setting up standardized and consistent epidemiological surveys;**
- **improving the reporting and record keeping of venomous bites by hospitals, clinics, dispensaries and primary health care posts, relating the bites to the species of venomous snake that caused the bite wherever possible; and**
- **fully implementing the use of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10th Revision (2007) (22) in official death certification (e.g. T 63.0 snake venom)¹.**

¹ <http://www.who.int/classifications/apps/icd/icd10online/>

5 WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION OF VENOMOUS SNAKES

5.1 Taxonomy of venomous snakes

Recognizing the species causing the greatest public health burden, designing and manufacturing antivenoms and optimizing patient treatment are all critically dependent on a correct understanding of the taxonomy of venomous snakes. Like other sciences, the field of taxonomy is constantly developing. New species are still being discovered, and many species formerly recognized as being widespread have been found to comprise multiple separate species as scientists obtain better information, often with new technologies. As the understanding of the relationships among species is still developing, the classification of species into genera is also subject to change. The names of venomous species used in these guidelines conform to the taxonomic nomenclature that was current at the time of preparation. Some groups of venomous snakes remain under-studied and poorly known. In these cases, the classification best supported by what evidence exists is presented with the limitation that new studies may result in changes to the nomenclature.

Clinicians, toxinologists, venom producers and antivenom manufacturers should endeavour to remain abreast of these nomenclatural changes. These changes often reflect improved knowledge of the heterogeneity of snake populations, and may have implications for venom producers, researchers and antivenom manufacturers. Although taxonomic changes do not necessarily indicate the presence of “new” venoms, they strongly suggest that toxinological and epidemiological research into these “new” taxa may be required to establish their medical relevance, if any.

Since some of the names of medically important species have changed in recent years, the following points are intended to enable readers to relate the current nomenclature to information in the former literature.

- The large group of Asian pit vipers, which for many years were referred to as a single genus (*Trimeresurus*), have been split into a number of new genera (e.g. *Cryptelytrops*, *Parias*, *Peltopelor*, *Himalayophis*, *Popeia*, *Viridovipera*, *Ovophis* and *Protobothrops*, with a few species retained in *Trimeresurus*) based on current views of the inter-relationships between these groups. There are divergent views on this approach to the taxonomy of these snakes, and interested parties should consult the literature. Some changes which occurred in the early 1980s have only gained wider acceptance during the past decade (i.e. *Protobothrops*). Medically important species formerly classified in *Trimeresurus* include *Cryptelytrops albolabris*, *C. erythrurus*, *C. insularis*, *Protobothrops flavoviridis*, *P. mucrosquamatus* and *Viridovipera stejnegeri*.
- It is likely that new species of cobra (*Naja* spp.) will be identified within existing taxa in both Africa and Asia; three new species (*N. ashei*, *N. mandalayensis* and *N. nubiae*) have been described and several subspecies elevated to specific status since 2000 (e.g. *Naja annulifera* and *N. anchietae*, from being subspecies of *N. haje*), in addition to the recent synonymization of the genera *Boulengerina* and *Paranaja* within the *Naja* genus. Such changes may hold significance for antivenom manufacturers and should stimulate further research to test whether existing antivenoms cover all target snake populations.
- Several medically important vipers have been reclassified: *Daboia siamensis* has been recognized as a separate species from *Daboia russelii*; *Macrovipera mauritanica* and *M. deserti* have been transferred to *Daboia*; the Central American rattlesnakes, formerly classified with *Crotalus durissus*, are now *Crotalus simus*; and *Bothrops neuwiedi* has been found to consist of a number of different species, three of which (*B. neuwiedi*, *B. diporus* and *B. mattogrossensis*) are of public health importance.

It is recognized that there have been many accepted revisions of taxonomy over the past few decades. These Guidelines are aimed at a very wide range of readers, and to assist users in matching some old and familiar names with the current nomenclature, Tables 1 and 2 summarize major changes between 1999 and 2008. Users are also encouraged to refer to appropriate references listed in the document.

Table 1
Genus-level name changes (1999–2008)

Currently accepted name	Previous name/s
<i>Bothrocophias hyoprora</i>	<i>Bothrops hyoprora</i>
<i>Bothrocophias microphthalmus</i>	<i>Bothrops microphthalmus</i>
<i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i>	<i>Trimeresurus albolabris</i>
<i>Cryptelytrops erythrurus</i>	<i>Trimeresurus erythrurus</i>
<i>Cryptelytrops insularis</i>	<i>Trimeresurus insularis</i> , <i>Trimeresurus albolabris insularis</i>
<i>Cryptelytrops macrops</i>	<i>Trimeresurus macrops</i>
<i>Cryptelytrops purpureomaculatus</i>	<i>Trimeresurus purpureomaculatus</i>
<i>Cryptelytrops septentrionalis</i>	<i>Trimeresurus septentrionalis</i> , <i>Trimeresurus albolabris septentrionalis</i>
<i>Daboia deserti</i>	<i>Macrovipera deserti</i> , <i>Vipera mauritanica deserti</i> , <i>Vipera lebetina deserti</i>
<i>Daboia mauritanica</i>	<i>Macrovipera mauritanica</i> , <i>Vipera lebetina mauritanica</i>
<i>Daboia palaestinae</i>	<i>Vipera palaestinae</i>
<i>Daboia russelii</i>	<i>Vipera russelii</i>
<i>Himalayophis tibetanus</i>	<i>Trimeresurus tibetanus</i>
<i>Montivipera raddei</i>	<i>Vipera raddei</i>
<i>Montivipera xanthina</i>	<i>Vipera xanthina</i>
<i>Naja annulata</i>	<i>Boulengerina annulata</i>
<i>Naja christyi</i>	<i>Boulengerina christyi</i>
<i>Parias flavomaculatus</i>	<i>Trimeresurus flavomaculatus</i>
<i>Parias sumatranus</i>	<i>Trimeresurus sumatranus</i>
<i>Protobothrops mangshanensis</i>	<i>Zhaoermia mangshanensis</i> , <i>Ermia mangshanensis</i> , <i>Trimeresurus mangshanensis</i>
<i>Viridovipera stejnegeri</i>	<i>Trimeresurus stejnegeri</i>

Table 2

Changes resulting from new species descriptions, or species redefinitions (1999–2008)

Currently accepted name	Previous name(s)
<i>Acanthophis laevis</i> (New Guinea)	<i>Acanthophis antarcticus laevis</i> , often confused with <i>A. antarcticus</i> or <i>A. praelongus</i> but neither occur in New Guinea
<i>Acanthophis rugosus</i> (New Guinea)	<i>Acanthophis antarcticus rugosus</i> , often confused with <i>A. antarcticus</i> or <i>A. praelongus</i> but neither occur in New Guinea
<i>Agkistrodon taylori</i>	<i>Agkistrodon bilineatus taylori</i>
<i>Bitis gabonica</i>	<i>Bitis gabonica gabonica</i>
<i>Bitis rhinoceros</i>	<i>Bitis gabonica rhinoceros</i>
<i>Bothrops diporus</i>	<i>Bothrops neuwiedi diporus</i>
<i>Bothrops mattogrossensis</i>	<i>Bothrops neuwiedi mattogrossensis</i> , <i>B.n. bolivianus</i>
<i>Bothrops pubescens</i>	<i>Bothrops neuwiedi pubescens</i>
<i>Crotalus oreganus</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Crotalus viridis</i>
<i>Crotalus simus</i>	<i>Crotalus durissus durissus</i> (Central American populations of <i>C. durissus</i> complex)
<i>Crotalus totonacus</i>	<i>Crotalus durissus totonacus</i>
<i>Crotalus tzabcan</i>	<i>Crotalus simus tzabcan</i> , <i>Crotalus durissus tzabcan</i>
<i>Daboia russelii</i>	<i>Daboia russelii russelii</i> , <i>Daboia r. pulchella</i>
<i>Daboia siamensis</i>	<i>Daboia russelii siamensis</i> , <i>D.r. limitis</i> , <i>D.r. sublimitis</i> , <i>D.r. formosensis</i>
<i>Echis borkini</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
<i>Echis omanensis</i>	Previously considered as north-eastern population of <i>Echis coloratus</i>
<i>Gloydius intermedius</i>	Previously named <i>Gloydius saxatilis</i>
<i>Lachesis acrochorda</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Lachesis stenophrys</i>
<i>Naja arabica</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Naja haje</i>
<i>Naja anchietae</i>	<i>Naja annulifera anchietae</i> , <i>Naja haje anchietae</i>
<i>Naja ashei</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Naja nigricollis</i>
<i>Naja nigricincta</i>	<i>Naja nigricollis nigricincta</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis woodi</i>
<i>Naja nubiae</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Naja pallida</i>
<i>Naja senegalensis</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Naja haje</i>
<i>Pseudechis rosignolii</i>	First described as <i>Pailsus rosignolii</i> , previously considered part of <i>Pseudechis australis</i>
<i>Pseudonaja aspidorhyncha</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i>
<i>Pseudonaja mengdeni</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i>
<i>Thelotornis mossambicanus</i>	<i>Thelotornis capensis mossambicanus</i>
<i>Thelotornis usambaricus</i>	<i>Thelotornis capensis mossambicanus</i>
<i>Tropidolaemus philippensis</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Tropidolaemus wagleri</i>
<i>Tropidolaemus subannulatus</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Tropidolaemus wagleri</i>
<i>Walterinnesia morgani</i>	Previously considered part of <i>Walterinnesia aegyptia</i>

5.2 Medically important venomous snakes

Based on current herpetological and medical literature, it is possible to partially prioritize the species of snakes that are of greatest medical importance in different regions. Detailed statistics on the species of snakes responsible for envenomings and fatalities throughout the world are lacking, except for a few epidemiological studies which include rigorous identification of the biting snake in a few scattered localities. Thus, establishing a list of medically important species for different countries, territories and other areas relies, at least in part, on extrapolation from the few known studies, as well as on the biology of the snake species concerned: e.g. where species of a group of snakes are known to be of public health importance, based on epidemiological studies, it seems reasonable to deduce that closely related species with similar natural history occurring in hitherto unstudied regions are also likely to be medically important. Examples include Asian cobras in several under-studied regions of Asia, lowland *Bungarus* species in Asia, and spitting cobras in Africa.

Tables 3–6 list the species of venomous snakes of greatest medical importance in each of four broad geographical regions. Species listed in these tables are either:

- those which are common or widespread in areas with large human populations and which cause numerous snakebites, resulting in high levels of morbidity, disability or mortality among victims; or
- poorly known species that are strongly suspected of falling into this category; or
- species which cause major and life-threatening envenoming responsive to antivenom, but are not common causes of bites.

The venoms of these species should be considered a starting point for establishing the most important targets for antivenom production. The need for additional epidemiological and toxinological research to better define which venoms to include and exclude for antivenom production in various regions, territories and countries around the world is emphasized.

Detailed data regarding countries, territories and other areas on species believed to contribute to the global burden of injury and/or to pose significant risk of morbidity or mortality are provided in Appendix 1.

Table 3

Venomous snakes of highest medical importance: Africa and the Middle East

North Africa/Middle East
<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis andersonii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja arabica</i> , <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja oxiana</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> , <i>Cerastes gasperettii</i> ; <i>Daboia mauritanica</i> ¹ , <i>Daboia palaestinae</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis borkini</i> , <i>Echis carinatus</i> , <i>Echis coloratus</i> , <i>Echis omanensis</i> ¹ , <i>Echis pyramidum</i> ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> , <i>Montivipera xanthina</i> ¹ ; <i>Pseudocerastes persicus</i>
Central sub-Saharan Africa
<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja anchietae</i> ¹ , <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> ; <i>Echis leucogaster</i> , <i>Echis ocellatus</i> , <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Eastern sub-Saharan Africa
<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis angusticeps</i> , <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja anchietae</i> ¹ , <i>Naja annulifera</i> , <i>Naja ashei</i> ¹ , <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja mossambica</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> ; <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Southern sub-Saharan Africa
<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis angusticeps</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja anchietae</i> ¹ , <i>Naja annulifera</i> , <i>Naja mossambica</i> , <i>Naja nigricincta</i> ¹ , <i>Naja nivea</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Western sub-Saharan Africa
<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> , <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> ; <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> , <i>Bitis rhinoceros</i> ¹ ; <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> ; <i>Echis jogeri</i> , <i>Echis leucogaster</i> , <i>Echis ocellatus</i>

Table 4

Venomous snakes of highest medical importance: Asia and Australasia

Central Asia
<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja oxiana</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis carinatus</i> ; <i>Gloydius halys</i> ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i>
East Asia
<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus multicinctus</i> ; <i>Naja atra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ ; <i>Daboia siamensis</i> ¹ ; <i>Deinagkistrodon acutus</i> ; <i>Gloydius blomhoffii</i> , <i>Gloydius brevicaudus</i> ; <i>Protobothrops flavoviridis</i> , <i>Protobothrops mucrosquamatus</i> ; <i>Viridovipera stejnegeri</i> ¹
South Asia
<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i> , <i>Bungarus niger</i> , <i>Bungarus sindanus</i> , <i>Bungarus walli</i> ; <i>Naja kaouthia</i> , <i>Naja naja</i> , <i>Naja oxiana</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops erythrus</i> ¹ ; <i>Daboia russelii</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis carinatus</i> ; <i>Hypnale hypnale</i> ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i>
South-East Asia (excluding Indonesian West Papua)
<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus candidus</i> , <i>Bungarus magnimaculatus</i> , <i>Bungarus multicinctus</i> , <i>Naja atra</i> , <i>Naja kaouthia</i> , <i>Naja mandalayensis</i> , <i>Naja philippinensis</i> , <i>Naja samarensis</i> , <i>Naja siamensis</i> , <i>Naja sputatrix</i> , <i>Naja sumatrana</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Calloselasma rhodostoma</i> ; <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ , <i>Cryptelytrops erythrus</i> ¹ , <i>Cryptelytrops insularis</i> ¹ ; <i>Daboia siamensis</i> ¹ ; <i>Deinagkistrodon acutus</i>
Australo-Papua (includes Indonesian West Papua)
<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Acanthophis laevis</i> ¹ ; <i>Notechis scutatus</i> ; <i>Oxyuranus scutellatus</i> ; <i>Pseudechis australis</i> ² , <i>Pseudonaja affinis</i> , <i>Pseudonaja mengdeni</i> , <i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i> , <i>Pseudonaja textilis</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.² *Pseudechis australis* is common and widespread and causes numerous snakebites; bites may be severe, although this species has not caused a death in Australia since 1968.

Table 5

Venomous snakes of highest medical importance: Europe

Central Europe
<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera ammodytes</i>
Eastern Europe
<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera berus</i>
Western Europe
<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera aspis</i> , <i>Vipera berus</i>

Table 6

Venomous snakes of highest medical importance: the Americas

North America
<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Agkistrodon bilineatus</i> , <i>Agkistrodon contortrix</i> , <i>Agkistrodon piscivorus</i> , <i>Agkistrodon taylori</i> ¹ ; <i>Bothrops asper</i> , <i>Crotalus adamanteus</i> , <i>Crotalus atrox</i> , <i>Crotalus horridus</i> , <i>Crotalus oreganus</i> ¹ , <i>Crotalus simus</i> ¹ , <i>Crotalus scutulatus</i> , <i>Crotalus totonacus</i> ¹ , <i>Crotalus viridis</i>
Caribbean
<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops</i> cf. <i>atrox</i> (Trinidad), <i>Bothrops caribbaeus</i> (St Lucia), <i>Bothrops lanceolatus</i> (Martinique); <i>Crotalus durissus</i> (Aruba)
Central America
<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops asper</i> ; <i>Crotalus simus</i> ¹
South America
<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops alternatus</i> , <i>Bothrops asper</i> , <i>Bothrops atrox</i> , <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i> , <i>Bothrops brazili</i> , <i>Bothrops diporus</i> ¹ , <i>Bothrops jararaca</i> , <i>Bothrops jararacussu</i> , <i>Bothrops leucurus</i> , <i>Bothrops mattogrossensis</i> ¹ , <i>Bothrops moojeni</i> , <i>Bothrops pictus</i> , <i>Bothrops venezuelensis</i> ; <i>Crotalus durissus</i> ; <i>Lachesis muta</i>

5.3 Minor venomous snake species

In many countries, territories and other areas there are species of snakes that rarely bite humans but are capable of causing severe or fatal envenoming. Their medical importance may not justify inclusion of their venoms in the immunizing mixture for production of polyspecific antivenoms but the need to make antivenoms against these species needs to be carefully analysed.

In some cases, such as with some Central American pit vipers (genera *Agkistrodon*, *Porthidium*, *Bothriechis*, *Atropoides* among others), there is clinically effective cross-neutralization of venoms by standard national polyspecific antivenoms (23).

In other cases, there is no effective cross-neutralization and manufacturers may therefore consider that the production of a small volume of monospecific antivenom is justified for use in the rare but potentially fatal cases of envenoming, provided that such cases can be identified. Such antivenoms are currently available for envenoming by the boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*), desert black snake (*Walterinnesia aegyptia*), Arabian burrowing asp (*Atractaspis andersonii*) (24), king cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*), Malayan krait (*Bungarus candidus*) (25) “yamakagashi” (*Rhabdophis tigrinus*) and red-necked keelback (*R. subminiatus*), Martinique’s

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

“Fer-de-lance” (*Bothrops lanceolatus*), St Lucia’s *B. caribbaeus*, and some species of American coral snake (*Micrurus*).

No antivenoms are currently available for envenoming by species such as African bush vipers (e.g. *Atheris*, *Proatheris*), berg adder (*Bitis atropos*) and several other small southern African *Bitis* spp. (e.g. *B. peringueyi*), Sri Lankan and south-west Indian humpnosed vipers (*Hypnale* spp.) (26, 27), many Asian pit vipers (“*Trimeresurus*” sensu lato), some species of kraits (e.g. *B. niger*) and all but one species of burrowing asp (genus *Atractaspis*).

An alternative to antivenom production against species that cause few, but potentially severe accidents, is to manufacture polyspecific antivenoms for broadly distributed groups that have similar venom compositions (e.g. African *Dendroaspis* and *Atractaspis*; Asian “green pit vipers”; American *Micrurus*). This may result in antivenoms that offer broad protection against venoms from minor species within genera, or species whose bites are less frequent than those of others in the same taxonomic groups (i.e. genus, sub-family or family).

5.4 Sea snake venoms

Although venomous marine sea snakes have not been included in the tables of medically important venomous snakes, it should be recognized that there are a number of species of marine snakes with potent venoms that can cause illness or death. Available evidence, particularly clinical experience, indicates that the major sea snake antivenom that is currently commercially available, which uses venom of a single sea snake, *Enhydrina schistosa*, plus a terrestrial Elapid, *Notechis scutatus*, in the immunizing venoms mixture, is effective against envenomings by other sea snakes on which there are clinical data. Further research would be needed to better define the full extent of cross-neutralization offered by this antivenom against other sea snake species.

5.5 Main recommendations

- **Clinicians, toxinologists, poison centres, regulators, venom producers and antivenom manufacturers should be well-informed about current nomenclature and new changes to taxonomy, so as to ensure the currency of information, correct identification of species in their countries, and correct selection and sourcing of venoms used in the manufacture of antivenoms.**
- **Identification of the medically important venomous snakes that cause the greatest burden of injury, disability and/or mortality is a critical prerequisite to meeting the need for efficacious antivenom. Improving the quality of the available data and correcting and amplifying the level of geographical detail and precision of attribution should be important priorities.**
- **Support for establishment of local capacity for venom production as a means of ensuring that venom immunogens from geographically representative populations of medically important snake species are used in antivenom production should improve antivenom specificity.**

6 ANTIVENOMS DESIGN: SELECTION OF SNAKE VENOMS

An accurate selection of snake venoms is critical for the production of antivenoms that have the capacity to cover the majority of cases of envenoming in a given geographical region, territory or country. The composition of snake venoms is very complex and a high inter-species and intra-species variation has been documented (28). Therefore the design of the antigenic mixture to be used in antivenom production is a critical task.

The selection of the most appropriate snake venoms for the production of antivenoms needs to be carefully analysed and should take into consideration:

- the geographical region where the antivenom is going to be used;
- the medically most relevant snakes from the geographical region where the antivenom is going to be used;
- the variability of venom composition within the region of distribution of a snake species;
- the information on cross-neutralization of antivenoms against the venoms of species not included in the mixture of venoms used to immunize animals for antivenom manufacture.

6.1 Selection and preparation of representative venom mixtures

Appendix 1 presents an up-to-date list of the most relevant species of snakes, from a medical standpoint, in the various regions, countries and territories of the world. Manufacturers should consider, as a priority, the venoms of species included in category 1 of this Appendix for the design of venom mixtures for immunization. Venoms to include in a venom pool used for animal immunization should be selected on the basis of the geographical region where an antivenom is intended to be distributed. On a case by case basis, venoms from species listed in category 2 could be included in an immunizing mixture.

There are variations in venom composition and antigenicity within the geographical range of a single taxonomic species as well as other causes of intra-species variation (such as changes according to the age of the specimens) (29, 30). Therefore, pooled representative samples of venoms should be prepared from snakes of different geographical origins and ages (see section 7 on venom preparation). Cross-neutralization of venoms outside the range of venoms used for immunization may extend the range of therapeutic applications of some antivenoms. Results of preclinical potency testing may be used to identify a potential cross-neutralization capacity of antivenoms, which should subsequently be confirmed by clinical testing in envenomed patients. In vitro immunological cross-reactivity should not be used as the single basis for recommending therapeutic use of an antivenom outside the range of venoms used in its production.

6.2 Manufacture of monospecific or polyspecific antivenoms

A major issue in designing antivenoms is to define whether they should have monospecific or polyspecific activity.

6.2.1 Monospecific antivenoms

Monospecific antivenoms are limited in use to a single species of venomous snake or to a few closely related species whose venoms show clinically effective cross-neutralization. These conditions apply in areas where:

- there is only one medically important species (e.g. *Vipera berus* in the United Kingdom and Scandinavia);

- a simple blood test, suitable for use even in peripheral health care centres, can define the biting species (e.g. detection of incoagulable blood by the 20-minute whole blood clotting test in the northern third of Africa where only *Echis* spp. cause coagulopathy);
- a simple algorithmic approach allows the species to be inferred from the pattern of clinical and biological features;
- there is a reliable and affordable rapid immunodiagnostic test readily available allowing the toxins to be identified unambiguously.

However, most countries are inhabited by several medically important species of snakes, where there may be no distinctive clinical syndrome to direct the use of a monospecific antivenom. In these cases, the manufacture of polyspecific antivenoms should be highly recommended.

6.2.2 Polyspecific antivenoms

Some clinicians are uncertain about using polyspecific antivenoms because of a fear that they have an inherently lower potency than monospecific antivenoms but this is not necessarily the case.

Polyspecific antivenoms can be generated by immunizing animals with a mixture of venoms from various snake species. The resulting antivenom will then contain antibodies against venom components of various snake species. When a polyspecific antivenom is produced this way, by immunizing an animal with venoms from several taxonomically-related snakes (e.g. different vipers), the titre of neutralizing antibodies against individual venoms may in some cases be higher than in a monospecific antivenom produced by immunizing an animal with only a single venom (31).

Polyspecific antivenoms can also be obtained either by:

- immunizing individual animals with the venom of a single species and then mixing the various hyperimmune plasmas for fractionation; or
- mixing appropriate quantities of the relevant purified antivenoms before formulation.

When using the latter option it is important to monitor the potency for each monospecific antivenom to ensure that the potency of the mix in the final product is consistent, reproducible and in line with the product specification for each individual venom. A sufficiently high titre should be guaranteed to avoid the need for infusion of an additional antivenom dose to the patient, as this may increase the risks of adverse reactions. However, in such “combined antivenoms”, neutralizing antibodies against all individual venoms will be proportionally diluted. In general, such dilution implies that a greater amount of antivenom proteins would be infused to patients, which is likely to increase the risks of adverse reactions.

In some regions, it is possible to differentiate envenomings on the basis of obvious distinct clinical effects: neurotoxicity, local tissue damage and/or haematological disturbances (haemorrhage or coagulopathy). Such situations justify the preparation of separate polyspecific antivenoms against mixtures of either neurotoxic venoms or venoms inflicting tissue damage, haemorrhage and/or coagulopathy.

Polyspecific antivenoms offer significant clinical advantages and their production should be encouraged, whenever technically possible. They can be produced using venoms from a range of species of venomous snakes of high medical relevance, broadening their usefulness and making identification of the biting species less critical, having the additional advantage of simplicity of distribution and supply.

6.3 Main recommendations

- **When selecting snake antivenoms national health authorities should first obtain and consider the information on the local species and their relative medical importance.**
- **The design of the venom mixture used in immunization, and the decision to prepare monospecific or polyspecific antivenoms, depend on the epidemiological and clinical information on snakebites in that particular region, country or area.**
- **Owing to the difficulty of identifying clinically the snake species responsible for envenoming, polyspecific antivenoms appropriate to the geographical region may be more practical and convenient to use than monospecific antivenoms.**
- **Polyspecific antivenom may be prepared either by mixing monospecific antivenoms or by immunizing animals with a mixture of venoms, provided that the specified neutralizing titre for each venom is achieved. The preparation of antivenoms by immunizing animals with a mixture of venoms from taxonomically related snakes may result in a higher titre antivenom.**
- **Manufacturers seeking marketing authorization for antivenoms in a given country should provide experimental evidence from preclinical testing that the product exhibits a neutralization capacity against different local venoms (see section 17).**

7 PREPARATION AND STORAGE OF SNAKE VENOM

Venom preparations are used both to hyper-immunize animals, as part of antivenom production, and to provide reference venom samples for routine and/or preclinical potency assessment of antivenoms. Ensuring their quality is therefore critical, and their preparation should follow the principles and recommendations mentioned below. The essential principles of quality systems should be followed in venom production including traceability, reproducibility, taxonomic accuracy, and hygiene control.

Venoms used for antivenom manufacture should be representative of the snake population living in the area where the antivenom is to be used. To take account of the variability in venom composition of an individual species (32–34), it is imperative that the venom of an adequate number of snakes (generally not less than 20–50 specimens) from the same geographical location should be collected together. A similar preparation can be used as a national standard of venoms for routine potency assessment of antivenoms (see section 8) and to perform preclinical testing of antivenoms (see section 17) to verify that the antivenom is suitable to treat envenomings in the region efficiently. Venom producers should follow rigorously the recommendations listed below and provide evidence of compliance on:

- geographical origin and size (and hence the approximate age) of each individual snake used for venom production;
- taxonomic details of each snake used;
- correct implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) documents in the case of endangered species;
- precautionary measures to avoid collection of venoms from sick snakes;
- individual identification of snakes contributing to each venom batch; and
- traceability of each venom batch.

Being able to fulfil the following is also strongly recommended:

- rapid freezing of the venom after collection;
- lyophilization of the venom for long-term storage¹; and
- confirmation of batch-to-batch similarity of venom of the same origin.

7.1 Production of snake venoms for immunization

The maintenance of a snake farm and the handling of snakes used for antivenom production should comply with quality systems principles.

7.1.1 Quarantine of snakes

All new accessions should be quarantined for at least 2 months in a special room (“quarantine room”) which should be located as far as possible from the “production rooms” where snakes qualified for milking are kept.

On arrival, snakes should be examined by a specialized veterinary surgeon (or experienced person) for ectoparasites and pentastomids – which should be eliminated using broad-spectrum antiparasitic drugs – and possible infections, particularly transmissible ones (35–37). Some viruses can be transmitted between different species (for example from *Bothrops* spp. to *Crotalus* spp.).

Sick snakes should be treated and their quarantine extended for 2 months after complete clinical recovery. Sick animals found in “production rooms” may be treated *in situ* but they cannot be milked for venom production. If an antibiotic treatment is given, the snake should not be milked for 4 weeks following the end of the treatment. When housed in good conditions, adult snakes collected from the wild can live on a snake farm for 10 years or more. When handling snakes, the risk of infection with human mosquito-borne viruses such as Japanese encephalitis should be prevented, since arbovirus infections have been reported in some snakes (38).

7.1.2 Maintenance of captive snakes for venom production

Individual snakes should preferably be housed in separate cages large enough to allow them to move about. There are several acceptable options for the design of the cages. Transparent or black (for burrowing snakes) plastic boxes are recommended. Cage materials should be impermeable, free from fissures, and inert to disinfectants, cleaning chemicals and common solvents. The selection of cleaning and disinfecting agents should be carefully considered to ensure they do not have adverse effects on the snakes. Cages should be adequately ventilated but perforations or mesh should be small enough to prevent escape. In the case of gravid female vipers, the mesh should be sufficiently fine to prevent escape of their tiny, live-born babies. The cage interior should be visible from the outside to allow safe maintenance and handling. Access to cages through doors, lids or sliding panels should facilitate management without compromising safety or allowing snakes to escape. A disposable floor covering (e.g. newspaper) is recommended. Cryptic and nocturnal species should be provided with a small shelter where they can hide.

The use of “hide boxes” is increasingly common as these provide both a more reassuring environment for the snake, and increased safety for keepers. Hide boxes should be designed to be slightly larger than the curled snake, with a single small entrance/exit hole, large enough to allow a recently fed snake easy access, plus some simple closure device to lock the snake in the hide

¹ Desiccation may be acceptable if proven to ensure stability of the preparation.

box. This will allow removal of the snake from the cage without hazard to the keeper, making routine cage maintenance simpler and safer. Hide boxes can be plastic or wooden, but should be readily cleanable. The roof of the hide box should be removable, to allow easy, safe extraction of the snake, when required.

Cages should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, ideally when soiled (perhaps almost daily for elapids), but at least every week. Faeces and uneaten or regurgitated rodents should be removed. To avoid misidentification of the snake, a label bearing its individual data should be attached to the cage and transferred with the snake when it is moved to another cage. Water should be provided on at least two days per week, but for species from humid climates, more frequent watering or misting may be required, particularly when sloughing. Water should be changed regularly and as soon as it becomes contaminated. Water treatment by ultraviolet (UV) sterilization or acidification may be considered.

Tens of cages may be accommodated in the same “production room”, provided that there is enough space for maintenance and milking. This room should be kept as clean as possible and thoroughly cleaned at least weekly. Access should be guarded by a tray containing an antiseptic which is placed on the floor at the entrance so that the footwear of all people entering is automatically treated. The temperature and humidity of the snake room should be controlled according to the climatic requirements of the particular snake species. Ventilation should be ensured using fans, air conditioning, or air renewing systems.

Access to snake rooms should be restricted to personnel responsible for their maintenance. They should be kept locked, with any windows permanently closed or protected by bars and mosquito proofing. Access should be via a safety porch not allowing simultaneous door opening and with a transparent panel allowing a view of the entire snake room to check whether any animals have escaped from their cages. The spaces below the doors should be less than 3 mm and all openings to the exterior (e.g. water pipes, drainage conduits, ventilation entrances and exits) should be protected by grilles having holes smaller than 5 mm. Natural light is often used; however, when not available, artificial light should be turned on for 12 hours during the day and turned off during the night for tropical species, but species from temperate zones may have different requirements. Snakes of the same species, collected at the same time in the same area should be placed in the same racks. The same “production room” can contain snakes of different species, provided that they have similar living requirements (i.e. temperature and humidity).

When kept under favourable housing and climatic conditions, and if left undisturbed, snakes will reproduce in captivity (39). Animals should be mated only with specimens from the same species, subspecies and local origin (40, 41). Sexing can be difficult, but is helped by the use of intra-cloacal probes. The male and the female should be individually identified and separated soon after copulation. The female should be kept under careful surveillance. Eggs from oviparous snakes and newborns from ovoviviparous snakes should be removed from their mother’s cage as soon as possible. When a difference in the venom composition of adult and juvenile snakes has been reported, as in the case of *Bothrops* and *Crotalus* species (32, 42–44), the venom of a certain proportion of juvenile snakes might be mixed with that of adults.

The ideal frequency of feeding captive snakes depends on the species and age of the snake, varying from twice per week to once per month. Snakes are usually fed after being milked, ideally with dead mice or other appropriate prey according to the snake species. Some snakes will only accept living prey, but attempts should be made to wean them onto dead prey. Snake-eating species, such as kraits, coral snakes and king cobras, can be enticed to take dead mice if the prey is first flavoured with snake tissue fluids or even snake faeces. Living, dead or regurgitated prey should not be left in the cage for more than a few hours. Force-feeding may be necessary for neonates and snakes that persistently refuse to feed. Feeding time affords an

opportunity to carefully check the snake for abnormal behaviour, wounds, and possible infections and to give dietary supplements when necessary. Individual feeding records are crucial. They should include details of when prey was offered, when it was consumed and whether it was regurgitated. The health of captive snakes can be estimated and recorded by observing regular feeding and by measuring their weight and length. These data are best stored on a computer system, using a “bar code” for each snake, or, alternatively, using a reliable manual recording system, and constitute useful records related to the venom batches produced. Water should be provided in the milking room from a tap, shower or reservoir, as is the case in laboratories where there is a risk of chemical injuries.

7.1.3 General maintenance of a snake farm

In addition to the rooms devoted to snake housing, sufficient space should be made available for the storage of consumables, rooms for cleaning and sanitizing cages and racks, animal houses for rat and mouse production, a storage room for conservation of the venom produced, control laboratories and administrative offices.

The cage cleaning rooms should be large enough to accommodate all the cages that are being cleaned and sanitized. Furthermore it is desirable to have two sets of washing and sanitizing rooms, a larger one for equipment from the venom production room and a smaller one for equipment from the quarantine area. These rooms should be secure in case a snake, inadvertently left in its cage, attempts to escape. The cleaning procedures for production rooms and for cages in which snakes are kept, and the cleaning schedule, should be established and documented.

Food animals, usually rodents, should be purpose-bred in clean conventional animal houses, and kept, handled and sacrificed in accordance with ethical principles. The rooms for rodent production should be large enough to provide sufficient numbers of rats or mice to feed the snakes. Alternatively, rodents can be purchased from qualified commercial sources. Breeding of rats and mice cannot take place in the same room, because of the stress induced by the rats in the mice. If snake are bred on the farm, egg incubators, and special rooms for newborns and juveniles are required. It should be taken into account that the diets required by young snakes might differ from those of adults (for instance, frogs and tadpoles are preferred to rodents by some species).

When possible, it is useful to have a small laboratory for performing quality control on the venoms (see section 8). An area for repairing broken equipment and for other miscellaneous purposes is also required. The administrative area should be sufficiently large and adequately equipped with computer facilities, so that the traceability requirements needed for venom production can be met. The whole venom production facility should be made secure against unauthorized intrusion.

7.1.4 Snake milking for venom production

Specific safety consideration for operators should be applied to snake milking (see section 7.2). All operations should be fully described in written procedures, which should be checked and revised periodically according to a written master document. Pools of venom require unique batch numbers, and the snake milkings contributing to the pool should be traceable.

7.1.4.1 Venom collection on snake farms

Snakes can be milked according to a regular schedule, depending on the species. The interval between milkings varies among producers and ranges from every 2 or 3 weeks to every 3 months, except for specimens that are in quarantine or are undergoing treatment and snakes in the process of sloughing their skins.

Handling equipment must be appropriate for the particular species of snake to cause the least stress and must be familiar to and afford safety to the operator. The snake is gently removed from its cage with a hook and either placed on a foam rubber pad before being pinned behind the head or encouraged to crawl into a transparent plastic tube. For very dangerous species, the use of short-acting general anaesthesia, or moderate cooling (15 °C) during milking can be considered (e.g. inhaled sevoflurane or sevoflurane, halothane or even carbon dioxide) as it reduces the risk of accidents both to the snake and to the snake-handler. Excessive cooling of the snake in a refrigerator is potentially harmful and is not recommended. For the collection of venom, the snake's head is grasped between index finger and thumb, just behind the angle of the jaw, while the snake's body is held between the trunk and the arm of the snake handler. An assistant should gently occlude the snake's cloaca to prevent messy contamination of the locality by spraying of faeces.

By applying gentle pressure, the snake's jaws are forced open, the fangs exposed and, in the case of vipers, erected. In the case of large vipers, the dental sheath is retracted when necessary with clean forceps. The fangs are pushed through a plastic/parafilm membrane (or the snake may voluntarily strike through the membrane) hooked over the lip of a glass vessel, and venom is squeezed out. The use of siliconized containers might be considered to minimize venom attaching to the container surface. While a brief electrical impulse of moderate intensity can be applied to stimulate venom secretion, this technique is not used or required by most venom producers, although it may help in avoiding debris in the venom. Any venom sample contaminated with blood should be rejected. After venom extraction, the fangs are carefully withdrawn from the collection vessel, while preventing damage to the mouth and dentition and avoiding the snake's impaling itself with its own fangs. After each venom milking, all materials used for milking should be sterilized with a flame, then cooled with a draught of air before the next snake is milked.

Special procedures that avoid direct handling should be employed in the case of burrowing asps (genus *Atractaspis*) because they cannot be held safely in the way described above (45). In the case of colubrid snakes, special techniques are required, such as application of foam rubber pads or capillary tubes to the posteriorly-placed fangs and the use of secretagogue drugs. Similarly, some elapid snakes have only small fangs capillary tubes or similar are required to collect venom. At the time of milking, there is an opportunity to remove broken or diseased fangs and to examine the snake for ectoparasites (e.g. ticks and mites), for pentastomids escaping from the snake's respiratory tract and for areas of adherent dead skin and opercular scales over the snake's eyes. The snake can be treated with drugs or vitamins at the same time and, if necessary, can be force-fed. Milking is often combined with cage cleaning and disinfection and the feeding of the snake. Avoiding trauma to the snake's mouth and dentition is critical to prevent infection and "mouth rot" and the milking process should be performed following clean practices.

Several snakes from the same group (same species and subspecies collected at the same time in the same area) can be milked into the same glass vessel. However, it is important for most venoms to be snap frozen at -20 °C or colder within 1 hour. One method of achieving this for venoms with high proteolytic activity, is to pour the collected venom into a vial maintained at a low temperature (ideally at -70 to -80 °C, but, if this is not possible, at -20 to -40 °C), every 10 minutes or at least every 30 minutes, before another snake from the same group is milked. Centrifugation of freshly collected venom is recommended, for instance at 1000 g for 5 minutes, since it removes cellular debris.

It is important to identify the vial into which the venom has been collected with an appropriate reference number. Primary identification must be on the vial. This allows the identification of all the snakes used, the day of the milking, the name of the operator and any other relevant information. To obtain large venom batches for the preparation of antivenom, one approach is to

use the same vial over several months for milking the same snakes, providing the cold chain is never broken. Pools of venom require unique batch numbers, and the snake milkings contributing to the pool should be traceable. The venom vial will then be freeze-dried and kept in the dark at a low temperature (either $-20\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ or $4\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$) in a well-sealed flask, precisely identified with a number, up to the time of delivery. However, some producers use an alternative system, keeping venom at $20\text{--}25\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ in a dessicator. Large pools of frozen venoms, collected from many individuals, are allowed to thaw at $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$, to avoid proteolytic degradation of venom components and, after being thoroughly mixed, aliquots of liquid venoms are prepared. These aliquots are then freeze-dried and stored in the dark at a low temperature (either $-20\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ or $4\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$). Aliquots of freeze-dried venoms should be adequately labelled. Freeze-drying cycles should be established, followed, and documented. Venom stored for considerable periods of time should be tested to ensure that no degradation or loss of activity has occurred (see section 8).

During milking, the wearing of protective clothing and a mask as well as vinyl gloves is recommended to prevent any accidents or infections. The equipment used for storage of frozen venom (freezers) and for freeze-drying, should be cleaned using established procedures, and the cleaning documented, in order to minimize cross-contamination. Likewise, equipment requiring calibration, such as freezers, balances and freeze-driers, should be calibrated as per a defined schedule.

7.1.4.2 Venom collection from wild snakes

In some parts of the world it is accepted practice that during certain seasons, collectors from a snake farm or local snake catchers will go to designated localities in the wild and collect venom from snakes manually and release them in the same locality after milking. In such cases, collecting venoms from wild snakes may be the only alternative, provided the venom and the collection process are subject to stringent rules, including most of the procedures already described for captive animals. At any time the collectors may milk from 50 to more than a hundred snakes; usually these are snakes of smaller size e.g. *Echis* species.

If collection of venom from wild snakes is necessary, most of the steps and safety procedures which are followed in milking captive snakes should be adhered to as far as possible, with certain modifications for the field conditions. The team which goes to the field for collection should include a herpetologist or zoologist who is able to help and confirm the identity of the snakes. Sick snakes, injured snakes and gravid females should not be milked. Detailed records of the locality, season, climate, date, size and number of snakes milked in one batch or pool should be maintained. One reference specimen from this locality should be taken to the laboratory and deposited as a voucher specimen for that pool with options for traceability. Where feasible, a photographic record of snakes milked in the field should be retained.

During milking, the wearing of protective clothing and a mask as well as vinyl gloves is recommended to prevent any accidents or infections, as for venom collection on a snake farm. Snake handling and milking should be done in an environment where there is little risk of external contamination. For example, the milking could be done inside a vehicle rather than in the open field. The field team should have training in first aid as well as in administration of antivenom, or they should be within reach of a hospital with antivenom available in case accidents occur. Milked venom should be frozen as soon as possible in a freezer in the vehicle. This is particularly important for venoms having high proteolytic activity, such as many viperid venoms, to avoid enzymatic degradation of venom components.

7.2 Staff responsible for handling snakes

7.2.1 Safety and health considerations

Handling and milking snakes is a dangerous operation. One envenoming occurred every two years in each of the 15 extraction facilities reviewed by Powell et al. (46). Twelve bites were recorded, 10 with envenoming, and one case of venom being squirted into the eye of a worker (47), between 1981 and 1999, when 370 768 venom extractions were performed at a venom production plant from *Bothrops moojeni*.

Milking should be done very carefully by well-trained snake handlers. All personnel involved in snake handling and venom collection should be fully informed about the potential dangers of being bitten and envenomed. They should be adequately trained, and the training procedures must be documented. A minimum of two people should be present during snake handling for venom collection. For safety reasons, it is recommended that sessions for milking of snakes should be interrupted at least every 2 hours, for a rest period before re-starting the process.

7.2.2 Clothing for snake and venom handling

Protective clothing should include an eye covering (plastic spectacles), especially when spitting elapids capable of squirting their venom are being handled, and a laboratory coat or gown. The wearing of protective gloves designed to prevent an effective bite is unpopular and not usually recommended because it impairs manual dexterity and sense of touch, but the use of nitrile gloves is advisable to prevent cross-contamination.

When lyophilized or desiccated venom is being handled, the safety of operators is paramount, since venom aerosols may form and affect people through skin breaks, eyes or mucous membranes, or may sensitize them to the venom. Appropriate gowning is necessary when handling lyophilized venom, to prevent contact of the venom with skin or mucous membranes.

7.2.3 Procedures to be followed if a bite occurs

There are several important measures to be put in place for dealing with a bite (48), as described below.

7.2.3.1 Procedures and alarms

Clearly defined, prominently displayed, well understood and regularly rehearsed procedures should be in place in case of a bite. An alarm should be sounded to summon help, the snake returned safely to its cage or box and the victim should withdraw to an area designated for first aid.

7.2.3.2 First-aid protocols

Clearly understandable first-aid protocols should be established for each species. These should be available in printed form adjacent to each cage. Immediate application of pressure-immobilization may be appropriate for treating the bites of rapidly neurotoxic elapids. However, the technique is not easy and, if they are to use the method properly, staff will need extensive training and must be provided with the necessary materials (a number of crepe bandages, 10 cm wide × 4.5 m long, and splints). Provision of appropriate analgesia for first aid should be considered. If venom enters the eyes, immediate irrigation with generous volumes of clean water is an urgent necessity.

7.2.3.3 Hospital admission

As a precaution, all victims of bites, scratches by snakes' fangs or teeth, and those in whom venom has entered the eye should be transferred as quickly as possible to the designated local hospital, by prearranged transport, for medical assessment. It may be helpful to remove from the cage, and take to the hospital with the victim, the label identifying the snake responsible for the bite, so that accurate identification of the snake species and of the antivenom to be administered is ensured.

If, as highly recommended, the appropriate antivenom is stocked by the snake farm, a supply should accompany the victim to hospital. Hospital staff should be warned in advance by telephone of the arrival of the casualty and informed about the species responsible and any background medical problems and relevant medical history, such as past reactions to antivenom or other equine sera (e.g. anti-tetanus serum), and known allergies.

An occupational hazard of snake handlers is the sensitization to venom proteins. Two out of 12 snakebites resulted in venom-anaphylaxis in a venom production plant (47). Hypersensitivity is usually acquired by mucosal contact with aerosolized lyophilized venom. Important early evidence of evolving sensitization is sneezing, coughing, wheezing, itching of the eyes or weeping when entering the snake room. No one with established venom allergy should be permitted to continue working with snakes. Venom-induced anaphylaxis should be treated with self-injectable adrenaline (epinephrine) 0.5 ml of 0.1% solution by intramuscular injection (adult dose) which should be stocked in the emergency drugs cupboard.

7.2.3.4 Medico-legal and health insurance aspects

The occupational exposure to venomous snakebites in commercial venom production units is the responsibility of the employers and requires their formal attention.

7.3 Main recommendations

- **Well-managed snake farms are a key element in the production of venom preparations meeting the quality requirements for the production of effective antivenoms.**
- **The quality of snake venoms used for animal immunization, as material for preclinical assessment of neutralization efficacy, or for the development of national or regional reference preparations is of critical importance.**
- **The procedures used in snake maintenance, handling and milking, as well as in all aspects of venom collection should be properly documented and scheduled.**
- **Venoms used for antivenom preparations should be representative of the entire snake population living in the area for which the polyspecific and/or monospecific antivenoms are intended to be used. Because of regional and individual variations in venom composition of snake species, the venoms used for immunization should be collected from a large number of individuals (generally at least 20–50) collected from various regions covering the entire geographical distribution of the particular venomous snake species.**

- **Venom producers should follow the following recommendations rigorously and should be able to demonstrate their application:**
 - **Taxonomic identity and geographical origin of each individual animal used for venom production should be known and recorded.**
 - **Housing, feeding, and handling of snakes should meet the highest veterinary and ethical standards, and follow documented protocols.**
 - **Adequate training should be provided to personnel involved in venom production in all procedures, and implementation of health and safety measures.**
 - **Formal guidelines and procedures should be established and applied in cases where staff are bitten or have venom spat in their eyes.**
 - **Venom should not be milked from sick animals, which should be quarantined.**
 - **Full traceability of each venom batch should be ensured.**
 - **Venoms should be frozen as soon as possible after collection, and at least within 1 hour.**
 - **Freeze-drying or dessication of the venoms should be done under conditions that ensure stability for long-term storage.**
 - **Batch-to-batch consistency of venoms of the same origin should be confirmed.**

8 QUALITY CONTROL OF VENOMS

8.1 Records and traceability

It is critical to identify accurately the species (and the subspecies, if any) of each individual snake used for venom production and the taxonomic status should be validated by a competent herpetologist. Increasingly, DNA taxonomy is replacing conventional morphological methods, but this technique is impracticable in most venom production units which will continue to rely on well-established physical features such as colour pattern and scale count to distinguish the principal medically important species.

Internationally recognized scientific names should be used and the bio-geographical origin of each snake should be specified, since differences in venom composition may occur between different populations of the same species or subspecies (32–34, 49). Venom producers can consult academic zoologists who have appropriate skill and experience.

Data pertaining to each numbered venom batch should include the information considered to be key for traceability, quality and specificities of the venom (e.g. identification of all the snakes used, the species, subspecies and biogeographical origin, feeding, health care, date of each milking and quantity of venom produced). This information should be made available upon request to any auditor or control authority.

In the case of long-term storage, venoms could be regularly re-dried by dessication to ensure minimum water content, as this is critical to their long-term stability.

8.2 National reference materials

The quality of snake venoms used as a reference standard by quality control laboratories and national regulatory authorities is crucial.

Due to the large variations in venom composition even within a single species it is recommended that national reference venoms should be established, which cover the entire intraspecies variability. Regional reference materials could be used when countries within the region share similar distribution of venomous snakes.

Establishing reference venoms ensures that the antivenoms produced will be tested against the relevant venoms in the specific countries or regions.

Venom batches may be prepared following the procedure outlined in section 7. Whatever their origin, the snakes used for these reference standards should be accurately authenticated by a qualified person (species, subspecies) and the place of capture recorded.

It is the responsibility of the venom producer to provide clear information on the species, the subspecies and the geographical origin of the snakes used for the production of the venoms supplied for antivenom production, quality control and preclinical studies. This information should be included in the technical dossier supporting the marketing authorization of any antivenom.

8.3 Characterization of venom batches

In addition to the certificate mentioning the scientific name of the snake species (and subspecies, if any), the geographical origin and the number of animals used for preparing the batch, and the date of collection of the venom, additional biochemical and biological information may be provided for each venom batch as evidence of consistency. This information may include analysis of:

- Biochemical characteristics of the venom:
 - protein concentration;
 - scans or pictures of sodium dodecyl sulfate–polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS–PAGE) (in reducing and non-reducing conditions);
 - size-exclusion chromatographic profiles (e.g. high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC));
- Enzymatic and toxicological activities of the venoms:
 - e.g. median lethal dose, LD₅₀.

If the venom producer is not able to perform these determinations, they can be subcontracted or, alternatively, depending on the agreement, the antivenom manufacturer can perform relevant assays to confirm compliance of venoms with specifications as part of the quality control system.

8.4 Main recommendations

- **Quality control of snake venoms is essential to provide assurance that the venoms are representative of venomous snakes inhabiting the region for which the antivenoms are prepared or designed.**

- **Traceability of each venom batch is important for rapid detection of any errors that might occur during the preparation process.**
- **For each venom batch, a certificate stating the scientific names of the snake species (and subspecies, if any), their geographical origin and the number of animals used in collecting the batch, the date of collection of the venom, and any other relevant information, should be made available by the venom supplier to the antivenom manufacturer as well as to the the regulatory authority if required.**
- **Consistency, within established limits of composition and quality, of venom batches produced over time for the same venomous species of the same origin should be guaranteed. Specific tests should be performed and data recorded for traceability, including: the protein concentration per g (or mg), an assessment of biochemical or biological activity, scans or pictures from SDS–PAGE (in reducing and non-reducing conditions), and/or size-exclusion chromatographic profiles of the venom. This information has proved useful to confirm the origin and the integrity of the venom preparation.**

9 OVERVIEW OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS OF ANTIVENOMS

Antivenoms are obtained following a complex production process (Figure 1), which involves several steps critical to quality, safety and efficacy. These steps are summarized below:

- Collection of venoms from individual venomous snakes that should be well identified and confirmed to be in good health. They should be representative of the region(s) where the resulting antivenom immunoglobulins are intended to be used.
- Milking of the selected snakes to prepare representative mixtures of venoms.
- Preparation of the venom(s) mixtures used for the programme of immunization of animals (most often horses). Animals should be selected and controlled carefully, and subjected to continuous health surveillance.
- Collection of blood or plasma from the immunized animals, once the immune response to the immunizing venom mixture has yielded satisfactory antibody levels.
- Preparation of the pool of plasma for fractionation.
- Fractionation of the plasma to extract the antivenom immunoglobulins.
- Formulation of the bulk antivenom immunoglobulins and aseptic filling.
- Quality control tests, including potency assessment by in vivo assay.
- Labelling, packaging, boxing and release.
- Distribution within the region(s) where snakes used to prepare the venoms to immunize the animals are prevalent.

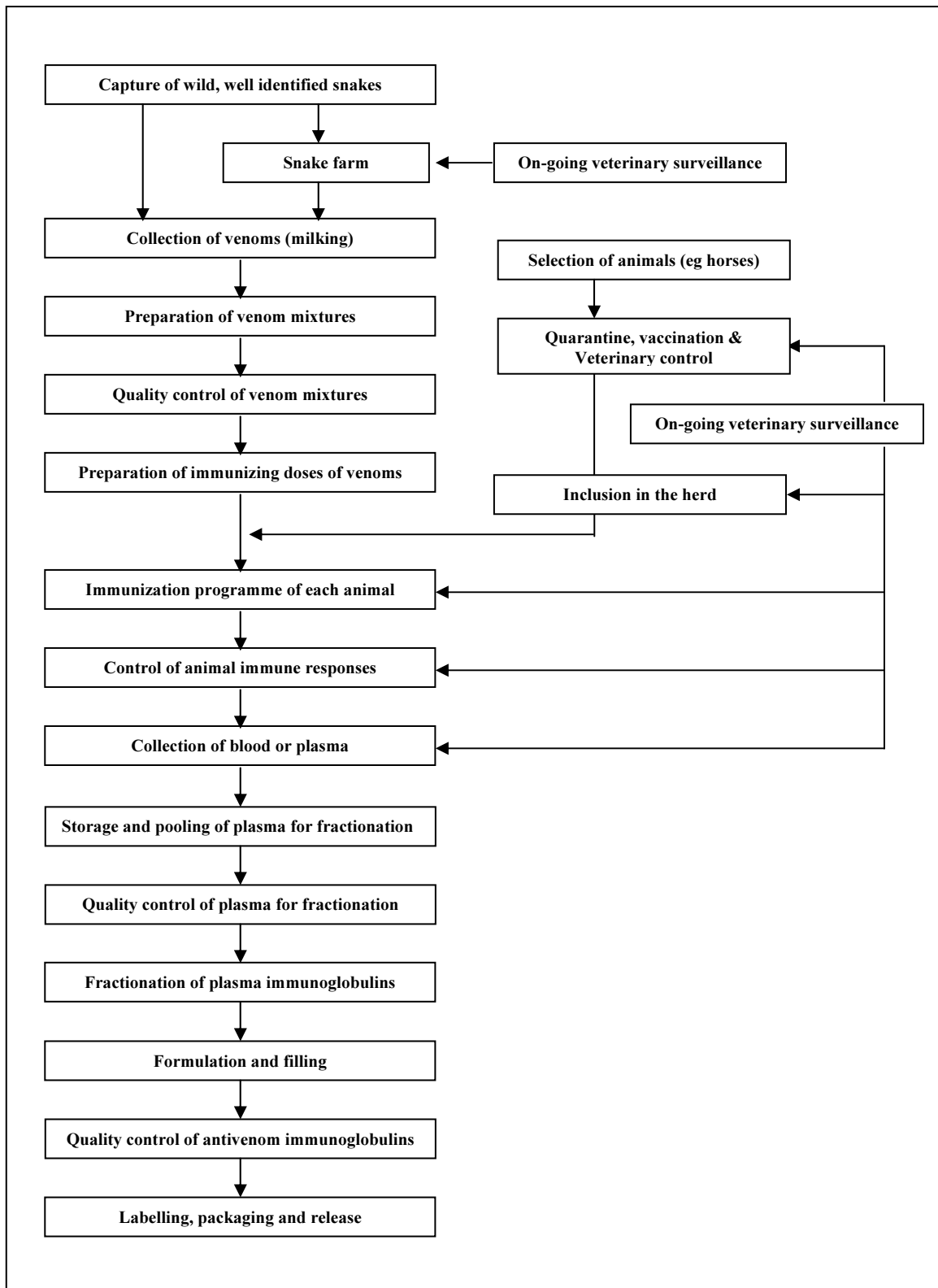


Figure 1
General manufacturing process of antivenoms

10 SELECTION AND VETERINARY HEALTH CARE OF ANIMALS USED FOR PRODUCTION OF ANTIVENOMS

10.1 Quarantine period

Before an animal is introduced into the herd used for a production programme, it should be subjected to a period of quarantine (which, in most countries, is from 6 to 12 weeks), depending upon the source of the animal, during which an appropriate veterinarian assessment is performed to ensure its suitability for the programme.

When an animal is imported from a country or region with different ecological characteristics, a period of acclimatization to the local environment of about 3 months is needed. Each individual animal should be unambiguously identified using, for example, a microchip, branding or ear-clipping.

In the case of horses and other equines, animals between 3 and 10 years are usually included in an immunization programme, but in some cases older animals may also be suitable as long as they exhibit a satisfactory immune response to the immunization programme. In the case of sheep, animals retired from wool production have proved capable of useful antibody production for a number of years (beyond the age of 10 years). No particular breed is preferred, but in general large horses or sheep are preferred because they yield larger individual volumes of blood.

10.2 Veterinary surveillance and vaccinations

The veterinary examination may include serological testing for the most prevalent infectious diseases for that type of animal in that particular geographical location.

Depending upon the local epidemiological situation, animals should be vaccinated against tetanus and, possibly other endemic diseases, such as rabies, equine influenza, anthrax, brucellosis, glanders, African horse sickness and equine encephalitides. Animals should go through a programme to eliminate gut helminths and other locally prevalent parasites.

Staff who are in regular contact with the animals should be vaccinated against tetanus and rabies.

10.3 Animal health surveillance after inclusion in the herd

After the quarantine period, if the animal is in good health according to a veterinary check-up, and the results of relevant serological tests are negative, the animal may be incorporated into the herd of animals used for immunization.

An individual record should be kept for each animal being used in an immunization programme for antivenom production. In addition to surveillance by a veterinary professional, the staff in charge of the animals should be well-trained, and the operations related to animal care and maintenance should be clearly specified in the standard operating procedure.

During the time an animal is used for immunization aimed at antivenom production, careful veterinary surveillance should be maintained, including continued vaccination regimes, and the performance of regular clinical examinations, together with clinical laboratory tests such as haemogram, clotting tests and other tests associated with the possible clinical effects of venoms (50).

Possible anaemia, resulting from excessive volume or frequency of bleeding (when erythrocytes are not re-infused into the animals after the whole blood bleeding session) or from the deleterious action of venoms should also be tested for.

The immune response against venom components should, when feasible, be followed throughout the immunization schedule, in order to detect when animals reach an acceptable antivenom titre. However, the monitoring of the immune response can be done on a pool of sera from various animals. This response may be followed by *in vivo* potency assays of neutralization of lethality or by *in vitro* tests, such as enzyme immunoassays (EIAs) (provided that a correlation has been demonstrated between these tests and the *in vivo* potency tests).

Whenever an animal develops any manifestation of sickness, it must be temporarily withdrawn from immunization programmes to allow it to receive proper attention and treatment. If the disease is controlled, the animal may return to the immunization programme after a suitable length of time, usually 4 weeks. If an animal is receiving any sort of antibiotic or drug, it should be withdrawn from the immunization programme for a period that would depend on the elimination kinetics of the particular drug(s) concerned. In the case of vaccination, this withdrawal period should not be shorter than 1 month¹. Animals should have appropriate physical exercise. Their feed should originate from a controlled source and should be free of ruminant-derived material. Ideally, the diet should include both hay and grass, or alternative plant material, and concentrated food preparations containing vitamins including folic acid, iron and other mineral supplements. The routine quality control of the food and water is recommended, in order to assure a consistent composition and adequate level of nutrients.

As a consequence of immunization with venoms (see section 11) a common problem in antivenom-producing animals is the development of local ulcers or abscesses (sterile and infected) at sites of venom injection. This is a particular problem when necrotic venoms and complete Freund's adjuvant are used. All injections should be given under aseptic conditions. There should be a limit to the total volume and dose of venom injected at a single site. Infected or ulcerated areas should not be used again until they have fully healed. In the event of the death of an animal being used for antivenom production, a careful analysis of the causes of death should be performed, including, when necessary, the performance of a necropsy.

Some animals show declining titres of specific venom antibodies over time, despite rest or increasing doses of immunizing venoms. Such animals should be retired from the immunization programme. In agreement with GMP principles and to avoid impact on the composition and consistency of the antivenom produced, it is, in principle, not considered good practice to move animals from a given venom immunization programme to another one, unless the animal has been used in the preparation of a monospecific antivenom that is included into a polyspecific preparation, or if it was used for the production of other animal-derived antisera (e.g. anti-rabies, anti-tetanus, or anti-botulism).

10.4 Main recommendations

- **Animals intended for antivenom production programmes should be identified to ensure full traceability and health surveillance.**
- **Animals should go through a quarantine period of 6–12 weeks during which they are submitted to veterinary scrutiny and are vaccinated against and treated for parasites.**
- **Following the quarantine period, they are introduced into the immunization programme. Animals should be appropriately housed, fed, and managed according to the highest veterinary and ethical standards.**

¹ In some areas, legislation stipulates that animals used for production of plasma cannot be treated with penicillin or streptomycin.

- **During immunization, the clinical status of each animal must be followed by a veterinarian through clinical and laboratory assessments. If an animal develops signs of disease, it should be temporarily separated from the immunization programme to receive appropriate treatment. Particular care must be paid to the local lesions that develop at the site of venom injections.**
- **The immune response to venoms of each animal should, when possible, be monitored during the immunization schedule; alternatively, the antivenom titres can be monitored indirectly by testing the plasma pool.**
- **An animal receiving an antibiotic or drug should be withdrawn from the immunization programme for a period depending on the elimination kinetics of each drug. In the case of vaccination, this withdrawal period should not be shorter than 1 month.**

11 IMMUNIZATION REGIMENS AND USE OF ADJUVANT

One of the most crucial steps in antivenom production involves the immunization of animals with venom(s) to produce a long-lasting and high titre antibody response against the lethal and other deleterious components in the immunogenic toxins. To achieve this goal, the following considerations are important:

- Venom(s) used should be prepared as described in section 7, and should be in an optimal condition for inducing specific and neutralizing antibodies.
- Immunogen and the immunization regimens used should not seriously affect the health of the animal.
- Preparation of immunogens and the immunization protocol should be technically simple and economical and use a minimal amount of venom. The procedures followed must be included in a protocol and their performance must be documented.

The antivenom manufacturer is responsible for defining the appropriate immunization programme (choice of doses, selection of adjuvants, sites of immunization, and bleeding schedule) able to generate the best immune response and plasma production, while also ensuring optimal animal care. GMP principles should be applied in the preparation of the immunizing doses as well as in the immunization process.

11.1 Animals used in antivenom production

Numerous animal species have been used on various scales in antivenom production (horse, sheep, donkey, goat and rabbit) or for experimental purposes (camel, llama, dog and hen) (51, 52). However, the production of large volumes of antivenom from large animals such as equines is an advantage compared to the smaller species. The selection of the animal species should be based on several considerations, such as locally prevalent diseases, availability in the region, adaptation to the local environment, and cost of maintenance. The information in these Guidelines refers mostly to horse-derived immunoglobulins.

The horse is the animal of choice for commercial antivenom production. Horses are docile, thrive in most climates and yield a large volume of plasma. Antivenoms made from horse plasma have proven over time to have a satisfactory safety and efficacy profile (53). Sheep have also been used as an alternative source for antivenom production because they are cheaper, easier to raise, can better tolerate oil-based adjuvant than horses, and their antibodies may be useful in patients who are hypersensitive to equine proteins. However, increasing concern about prion

diseases may limit the use of the sheep as an animal for commercial antivenom production. Larger animals are preferable to smaller ones because of their greater blood volume, but breed and age are less important. Any animals used should be under veterinary supervision (see section 10). When sheep or goats are to be used, manufacturers should comply with regulations to minimize the risk of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies to humans, such as the WHO Guidelines on tissue infectivity distribution in transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (54).

11.2 Venoms used for immunization

Venoms used as immunogens in antivenom production are chosen based on criteria discussed in section 6. Priority should be given to venoms from snakes responsible for frequent envenomings. The quality, quantity, and biological variation of venoms are important considerations (see sections 7 and 8).

11.3 Preparation of venom doses

Venom doses used for the immunization of animals should be prepared carefully in a clean environment, with an established, scheduled and documented cleaning regime. All venom manipulations should be performed using aseptic techniques under a hood; for highly toxic venoms, a cytotoxic cabinet may be used. Batch process records should be completed for each dose preparation session. The venom batches used and the animals to be immunized should be recorded and the containers in which the venom is dissolved should be appropriately identified. Ideally, the calculations and operations related to the dose of venom to be used, as well as dilutions, require verification by a second person to ensure accuracy and to prevent errors that may lead to animals receiving overdoses.

Venoms, when freeze-dried, are highly hygroscopic and allergenic, thus care should be taken when manipulating them. When taken out of the refrigerator or freezer, the venom should be allowed to warm up to room temperature before the bottle is opened, otherwise condensation may occur causing inaccuracy in weighing and, more seriously, proteolytic degradation of the venom proteins by venom enzymes. Venom should be dissolved in distilled water or buffer, but care should be taken not to shake the solution too vigorously since excessive foaming may cause protein denaturation.

The solvents used to dissolve venoms should be sterile and within established expiry periods. A stock solution of each venom should be prepared separately, rather than being mixed with other venoms. This is to allow flexibility of dosage and to avoid proteolytic degradation by one venom component of other venom proteins. Venom solutions can be sterile-filtered where this is known not to affect the potency of the preparation, aliquoted, labelled and stored appropriately (e.g. refrigerated, frozen at -15 to -20 °C, or deep frozen at -70 °C) for a short time (less than 1 month). However, it is recommended that venoms used for immunization be freshly prepared at the time of use.

All the equipment used for venom storage (freezers and refrigerators) and preparation (e.g. balances) should be calibrated and validated for their intended purpose. Balances should be calibrated at least annually and calibration should be checked daily. Where possible, laboratory items used in venom preparation, i.e. pipettes, syringes and other such items should be pre-sterilized, single-use, disposable items. The siliconization of venom solution containers may be considered to avoid the adherence of venom components to the surfaces of containers. Transport of venom solutions to the facilities where animals are going to be injected should be done in a safe manner.

Care should be taken to avoid accidents that may result in envenoming of the persons preparing the venom solutions. Protective equipment (e.g. eyewear, gloves and gowns) should be worn by personnel preparing venom solutions. Procedures for cleaning up broken glass or plastic containers that have held venom should be established and the personnel should be trained to follow them.

11.4 Detoxification of venom

Some snake venoms can cause local and/or systemic toxicity when injected into naive horses at the beginning of an immunization course. Various physical or chemical means have been adopted to decrease venom toxicity, for example, treatment with aldehydes (formaldehyde or glutaraldehyde), hypochlorite, ultraviolet or gamma radiation, and heat, among others. However, in most cases, not only the toxic sites, but also the antigenic sites of the toxins are destroyed after these treatments (55). For example, when glutaraldehyde is used, the protein polymerization is often extensive and is difficult to control and reproduce. Thus, although the detoxified toxin (toxoid or venoid) induces vigorous antibody response, the antibodies usually fail to neutralize the native toxin. In fact, no detoxification is usually necessary if inoculation is made with a small dose of venom well-emulsified in an adjuvant such as Freund's complete or incomplete adjuvants.

11.5 Immunological adjuvants

Various types of immunological adjuvants have been tested, for example, Freund's complete and incomplete adjuvants, aluminium salts (hydroxide and phosphate), bentonite and liposomes (56). The choice of adjuvant is determined by its effectiveness, side-effects, ease of preparation, especially on a large scale, and cost. It may vary depending upon the type of venoms and following manufacturers' experience. Freund's incomplete adjuvant (FIA) contains mineral oil and an emulsifier. Freund's complete adjuvant (FCA), which contains mineral oil, an emulsifier and inactivated *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, has been shown in experimental animals to be one of the most potent adjuvants known. However, horses are quite sensitive to FCA which tends to cause granuloma formation. For this reason, some producers prefer to use other adjuvants.

It has been noted that the granuloma caused by FCA is due to injection of a large volume (5–10 ml) of the emulsified immunogen at 1 or 2 sites. The large granuloma formed usually ruptures, resulting in a large infected wound. If the emulsified immunogen is injected subcutaneously in small volumes (50–200 µl/site) at multiple sites of injection, granuloma formation may be avoided.

11.6 Preparation of immunogen in adjuvants

To minimize infection at the immunization sites, all manipulations should be carried out under aseptic conditions. Venom solutions are prepared in distilled water or phosphate-buffered saline solution (PBS) and filtered through a 0.22-µm membrane. The venom solution is then mixed and/or emulsified with adjuvant, according to the instructions of the supplier. An example for the preparation of venom immunogen in FCA, FIA and aluminium salts is described in Box 1.

Box 1**Example of preparation of venom immunogen in FCA, FIA and aluminium salts**

Since FCA can cause severe irritation, precautions should be taken to avoid contact with the eyes, and protective eyewear and gloves are recommended. The vial containing FCA is shaken to disperse the insoluble Mycobacterium tuberculosis. The venom solution is mixed in a stainless steel container with an equal volume of FCA at 4 °C. The emulsification is achieved by vigorous blending in a high-speed blender at a speed of approximately 3000 rpm for 15 minutes. The container is put in ice water to dissipate the heat generated. The resultant emulsion should be quite thick and remains stable when dropped on the surface of cold water. The highly viscous emulsion is then transferred into a sterile 50-ml glass syringe with the plunger removed. The plunger is then put into the syringe to expel any air pocket inside. By means of a three-way stopcock, the emulsion is then transferred from the 50-ml syringe into a 1-ml or 2-ml glass syringe. With the use of an 18G–20G needle, the water-in-oil emulsion is ready for subcutaneous injection.

Immunogen in FIA is prepared by a process similar to that described above except that FIA is used in place of FCA. Both the FCA and FIA emulsified immunogens may, if necessary, be stored at 4 °C, preferably for a maximum of 2 weeks but re-emulsification is needed before their injection.

When the immunogen is prepared in Al(OH)₃ (aluminium hydroxide) or Al(PO)₄ (aluminium phosphate), a sterile venom solution and a suspension of aluminium salts are mixed in a ratio of 1:3 (v/v) and homogenized. When using other adjuvants, the preparation of the solution or emulsion should follow the manufacturer's instructions for that type of adjuvant.

11.7 Immunization of animals

The areas to be immunized should be thoroughly scrubbed with a disinfectant, shaved and rubbed with 70% ethanol before venom immunogen injection.

In general, the sites of immunization (Figure 2) should be in areas close to major lymph nodes, preferably on the animal's neck and back, while the route of injection should be subcutaneous so as to recruit a large number of antigen presenting cells and consequently resulting in high antibody response. Some procedures call for a small volume of injection at each site (50–200 µl) so that the total surface area of the immunogen droplets is maximized, enhancing the interaction with the antigen presenting cells and the immune response (57, 58). An example of immunization of a horse using venom emulsified in FCA is described in Box 2.

Other immunization protocols, using larger amounts of venoms devoid of local tissue-damaging activity (such as those of some elapids) and/or adjuvants other than FCA may be used with satisfactory results, as long as the schedule does not compromise the health of the animals. In situations where the main toxins of a given venom have a low molecular mass and would not induce a sufficient immune response if injected together with the other venom components, isolating such toxins using mild chromatographic procedures can be beneficial. Such isolated fractions can then be used for immunization.

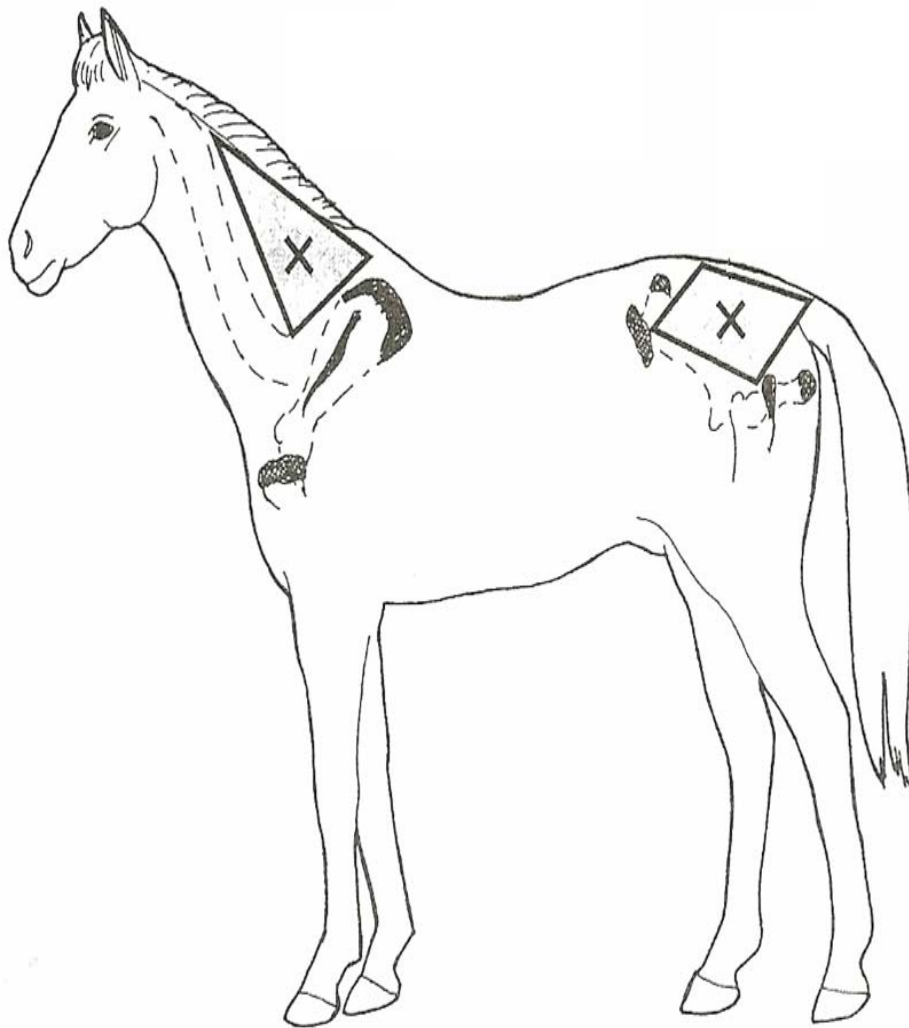


Figure 2
Recommended areas of immunization in horses

Box 2**Example of immunization of horses using FCA, FIA and aluminium salts**

The primary immunization could be made with venom(s) mixed with (FCA) as described in Box 1. The initial dose of each venom could be as low as 1–4 mg/horse with a total combined volume of injection of about 2 ml. The immunogen is filled in a 1-ml glass syringe with an 18G needle as described above. Subcutaneous injections of 100–200 µl of immunogen are made at each site, up to as many as 8–12 sites, although some producers may use only 3–4 injection sites. The neck of the horse, supplied with extensive lymphatic vessels and large lymph nodes, is a preferred area for immunization. If inoculation is made on the lateral sides of the neck, the animal tends to rub itself causing skin blisters. Thus, injections should be made to the upper (dorsal) part of the neck, close to the mane. About 4–6 injections can be made at each side of the neck. If injection in the rump is possible, 1–2 injections can be made in the area between the outer hip bone and the top of the thigh bone. The scratching of injected sites by animals can be partially alleviated by massaging the injection site after venom injection to disperse the dose material.

Immunization using Freund's complete adjuvant is usually made only once; repeated use of this adjuvant may in most cases cause serious reactions which can affect the horse's health. After 2 weeks, the horses should receive a booster injection with the same venom(s) well emulsified in Freund's incomplete adjuvant. Similar volume and areas of injection to those described above can be made. Subsequent booster immunizations at 2-week intervals can be made with higher doses (5–10 mg) of venom(s) in saline or mixed with aluminium salts or any other adjuvant selected. In this case, subcutaneous injections of 1 ml of immunogen at each site in a total of 4 sites are recommended.

Blood (10–20 ml) should be drawn before each immunization. Serum or plasma is prepared and EIA (enzyme immunoassay) titres and/or lethality potency are determined. When the EIA titres reach a plateau, usually about 8–10 weeks after the primary immunization, an *in vivo* potency assay may be performed to confirm that the horse could be bled. After bleeding for antivenom production, the horses are allowed 3–8 weeks rest, depending on their physical condition. After the rest period, a new round of immunization can be made as described above, but without the use of Freund's complete adjuvant.

11.8 Traceability of the immunization process

The traceability of the immunization process is critical for the quality control of the antivenoms produced and the steps to ensure it should be performed very accurately. Each immunized animal should be identified by its code number (see section 10). The details of each immunization step should be recorded precisely. The details to be recorded include:

- date of immunization;
- batch(es) of venom(s) used with its (their) reference number(s) (see section 8);
- venom dose(s);
- adjuvant and/or salt used;
- names of the veterinary and supporting staff in charge of the immunization;
- eventual reaction and/or sickness.

The antivenom titre of the immunized animals should be followed throughout the immunization procedure either *in vitro*, using EIA, during the immunization phase, or *in vivo*, by neutralization potency assays of lethality when the immunization plateau is reached or before each blood collection.

Each plasma batch should be assigned a unique reference number (e.g. a bar code), which should allow complete traceability to the donor animal. Information (such as the date of collection, the unique identification number of the immunized donor animal, and the reference number of the venom(s) used for immunization) should be recorded to allow traceability to all venoms. Computer-based databases are very useful for properly recording these data, which are crucial for the traceability of the antivenoms produced. Standard procedures should be used to protect the integrity of data stored on a computer, including regular, frequent backup, protection from unauthorized access, and storing backup copies securely off-site.

11.9 Main recommendations

- **Venom solutions should be prepared in such a way as to minimize proteolytic digestion and denaturation of the venom proteins. Venom solution should be prepared under aseptic conditions to avoid infection at the injection sites.**
- **The type of adjuvant used is selected on the basis of its effectiveness, side-effects, ease of preparation and cost.**
- **Primary immunization should be made by subcutaneous injections of small volumes at multiple sites close to the animal's lymphatic system to favour the recruitment of antigen presenting cells and involving anatomically different groups of lymph nodes for antibody production.**
- **Subsequent booster injections can be made using venom immunogen doses, at volumes and intervals depending on the type of adjuvant used, until the antivenom titre reaches a plateau or a pre-established minimum accepted titre.**
- **After collection of blood for antivenom production, animals should have a resting period of 3–8 weeks. After this, a new round of immunization can be performed as above without the use of Freund's complete adjuvant.**
- **All steps in the immunization of the immunized donor animal, as well as the collection of blood or plasma should be traceable.**

12 COLLECTION AND CONTROL OF ANIMAL PLASMA FOR FRACTIONATION

Historically, serum separated from the blood of hyperimmunized horses was the basis of “antivenin serum-therapy”, but today plasma is used, almost exclusively, as the starting material and undergoes a fractionation process for the separation of purified antivenoms. Thus “antivenom immunoglobulins” is the preferred term, rather than “anti-snakebite serum” or “antiserum” which are imprecise and confusing terms that refer to a crude therapeutic preparation.

Plasma as a starting material is preferred to serum largely because erythrocytes can be returned to the animal, thus preventing anaemia and hypovolaemia in the donor animal and allowing more frequent bleeding. Some laboratories have found that using plasma enables higher recovery of antibodies per donation and it is less contaminated with haemoglobin. Separation of plasma from anticoagulated blood is much more rapid than separation of serum from clotted blood. Plasma for

fractionation can be obtained either from the collection of whole blood or by the apheresis procedure.

12.1 Health control of the animal prior to and during bleeding sessions

When an immunized animal has developed an antivenom antibody titre that meets the necessary specifications, it can be bled. Before bleeding is performed, the animals should be evaluated by a veterinarian or other qualified person and declared healthy. Animals showing evidence of clinical deterioration, such as weight loss, drop in haemoglobin or serum protein concentration below a critical predefined value, or evidence of infections, should not be bled.

12.2 Premises for blood or plasma collection

The bleeding of animals should be performed in designated rooms or areas dedicated to this activity and equipped with appropriate restraining devices. Some producers may design the bleeding rooms so that they can be closed, if needed, during the bleeding sessions, but this is not general practice. The rooms or areas should be thoroughly washed and cleaned before and after each bleeding session and their design should facilitate such cleaning procedures, which should be clearly established. The room or area should be inspected before the confinement of the animal. Animals need to be made as safe and comfortable as possible, in a quiet environment, during bleeding to minimize the chance of injury to the animal or its handlers. Individual animals should be confined in circumstances that reduce the potential for stress as much as possible. It is recommended that these rooms allow the simultaneous bleeding of various horses to reduce the time required for this operation as well as the stress.

12.3 Blood or plasma collection session

Animals are bled by venipuncture from the external jugular vein. The area surrounding the venipuncture site should be shaved before bleeding and thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, using a disinfectant that has not reached the end of its recommended shelf-life, and, depending on the type of disinfectant, it should be allowed to dry. The disinfected area should not be touched or palpated before the needle has been inserted.

Before venipuncture all containers and tubing should be inspected for defects (for example, abnormal moisture or discoloration as these may suggest a defect). There should be means to determine the volume of blood or plasma collected (such as a weighing machine).

The clinical condition of the animals being bled should be closely monitored at the time of bleeding and during the days that follow, and bleeding should be suspended in the event of any adverse effect on the animal. If an animal shows signs of distress during the operation, the collection procedure should be terminated. In addition, animals should be kept under observation for at least 1 hour after the bleeding to allow any evidence of physical alterations to be detected.

12.4 Labelling and identification

The identity of the animal should be recorded immediately before venipuncture. Labels on all bottles or bags of blood or plasma should be marked with the animal's unique identification number. The label should contain the following information: specificity of antivenom, plasma unit number and date of collection.

12.4.1 Collection and storage of whole blood

12.4.1.1 Collection

The volume of blood to be obtained depends on the species and size of the immunized animal. It is recommended that around 13–15 ml of blood per kilogram body weight are collected in one bleeding session. For sheep, 0.5 l is a typical yield, whereas in the case of horses, the volume of blood may range between 3 and 6 l, depending on the size of the animal.

Blood is collected, ideally, in disposable plastic bags containing sterile citrate anticoagulant. Usually, the volume ratio of anticoagulant to blood is 1:9. Use of double plastic bags containing anticoagulant is recommended to avoid bacterial contamination and for ease of use. When plastic bags are not available, disposable polypropylene plastic bottles, or sterilized glass bottles containing anticoagulant may be considered.

While the bleeding is taking place, a constant flow of blood should be ensured. Blood should be gently and continuously mixed with the anticoagulant solution to ensure a homogeneous distribution of the anticoagulant, to avoid the risks of activation of the coagulation cascade and, therefore, avoid the formation of clots. The duration of a bleeding session is usually between 30 and 45 minutes depending upon the weight of the animal and the total volume collected. Care should be taken to avoid contamination of the blood by exposing the needle to contaminated surfaces.

12.4.1.2 Storage

The bags or bottles in which the whole blood has been collected should be appropriately cleaned and sanitized on their external surfaces. They should be put into a refrigerated room (2–8 °C) for the plasma and blood cells separation procedure. They should be stored for not more than 24 hours before the reinfusion of the red cells.

Alternatively, aseptically-collected blood can be stored for a maximum of 7 hours at 20–25 °C to allow for sedimentation. Under such circumstances, great care should be taken to avoid bacterial contamination.

12.4.1.3 Separation of plasma from whole blood

Hyperimmune plasma should be separated from blood cells under aseptic conditions and should be transferred into sterile containers (plastic bags, bottles, or stainless steel containers). A designated room, designed to allow proper cleaning and sanitization, should be used for separation. When bottles are used, separation of plasma from blood cells should be performed in a laminar flow cabinet located in a room separated from the plasma fractionation area.

12.4.1.4 Reinfusion of the erythrocytes

Reinfusion of the erythrocytes after whole blood collection is recommended.

Blood cells, most specifically erythrocytes (red blood cells), should be separated from plasma by validated centrifugation or sedimentation procedures. Erythrocyte reinfusion should take place within 24 hours after blood collection, and after being suspended in sterile saline solution at 32–37 °C prior to infusion. This procedure in which whole blood is collected and erythrocytes are reinfused to the animal is commonly referred to as “manual apheresis”.

12.4.2 Plasma collection by automatic apheresis and storage

12.4.2.1 Plasma collection

In some laboratories, plasmapheresis machines are used to perform automatic plasma collection. This has proved a useful investment in some facilities; it ensures that the animal does not become hypovolaemic and it reduces the risks of handling errors, in particular during re-infusion of the erythrocytes to the donor. Plasma from automatic apheresis tends to be less contaminated by blood cells (red blood cells, leukocytes and platelets) and in the experience of some laboratories is easier to fractionate, as the filtration steps, in particular, are more readily performed, resulting in higher yields.

In such procedures, whole blood is collected from the animal, mixed with anticoagulant, and passed through an automated cell separator. The plasma is separated from the cellular components of the blood, which are returned to the animal in a series of collection/separation and return cycles. The plasma is separated from the red blood cells by centrifugation or filtration, or a combination of the two. The operational parameters of the plasmapheresis equipment are provided by the manufacturers of the equipment. In general, the anticoagulant is delivered at a rate yielding a specified ratio of anticoagulant to blood. The anticoagulant solutions used include AB16 (35.6 g sodium citrate, 12.6 g citric acid monohydrate, 51.0 g glucose monohydrate per 1 litre using water for injection) and anticoagulant citrate dextrose formula A (ACDA) (22.0 g sodium citrate, 8.0 g citric acid, 24.5 g dextrose monohydrate, per 1 litre using water for injection). The number of collection/separation and return cycles for each donor animal depends on the total volume of plasma that is to be harvested. For horses, the average volume of plasma collected may be about 6 litres per session. The number of cycles ranges from 10 to 20 depending upon the haematocrit of the horses. The collection process lasts for 1–4 hours. The apheresis equipment and apheresis procedures should be validated, maintained and serviced. Machine plasmapheresis can take several hours and animals can be fed during the operation.

12.4.2.2 Plasma storage

Apheresis plasma: bags or bottles should be stored in a refrigerated room (2–8 °C) in the dark until the fractionation process starts. This storage room should be designed to allow proper cleaning and sanitization.

12.5 Pooling

Plasma from individual animals should be pooled into sterile and sanitized containers before fractionation. For traceability purposes each plasma pool should be identified with a unique number. The number of plasma units collected from individual animals and used in the pool should be recorded.

Such pooling should be performed in an environment suitable to prevent microbial contamination, like classified areas (class D (59)) and pools should be adequately identified. The room should be designed to allow for appropriate cleaning and sanitization of all surfaces. Individual or pooled plasma should be stored at 2–8 °C in a room dedicated for this purpose. To ensure the prevention of microbial contamination of plasma, preservatives (phenol or cresols)¹ can be added at a dose of less than 3 g/l at this stage and kept during storage of plasma. Care should be taken to dilute the phenol or cresols with water or saline solution before they are added to plasma, to avoid denaturation of plasma proteins. The transportation of containers or bottles

¹ In these guidelines, cresol isomers are referred to as cresols.

containing pooled plasma within the production facility or between facilities should be performed in such a way that contamination is avoided and the cold chain is maintained.

To avoid the risk of contamination, it is recommended that individual or pooled plasma is not stored for too long before fractionation, i.e. the plasma should be fractionated as soon as possible after pooling. In the event that plasma is stored for prolonged periods of time (for instance 6 months), the storage time and conditions should be validated to ensure that there is no detrimental impact on the quality of the plasma material, on the fractionation process, or on the quality, efficacy and stability of the antivenoms.

It is also the experience of some manufacturers that plasma can be stored frozen at $-20\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$, particularly if no preservative is added.

12.6 Control of plasma prior to fractionation

Before fractionation, pools of plasma should be checked for macroscopically evident precipitates, gross haemolysis and bacterial contamination (bioburden assay). The neutralizing potency of the starting plasma should be ensured so that the resulting antivenoms will be within potency specifications. Additional checks may include, when relevant, a test for pyrogenic substances and total protein content.

Plasma pools should be discarded if the bioburden exceeds a defined limit stated in the marketing dossier or if the neutralizing potency is below a minimum limit established by the producer. Cloudy plasma, below this defined bioburden limit, may still be used for fractionation provided the fractionation process and product quality has been proven not to be impaired. Grossly haemolysed plasma should not be used for fractionation.

12.7 Main recommendations

- **When animals have developed an adequate immune response against venoms, and if they are in good health, they can be bled for antivenom production. Bleeding should be performed in enclosed rooms which should be kept scrupulously clean. Traceability of the donations should be ensured.**
- **Plasma is preferred to serum as a source material. Animals should be bled from the external jugular vein. Plasma can be obtained either from whole blood or by automated plasmapheresis and using approved anticoagulants. Blood or plasma should ideally be collected into closed plastic bags. When this is not possible, glass or plastic bottles can be used, if they can be readily cleaned and sterilized.**
- **Plasmapheresis is recommended using either automatic or manual procedures. When manual apheresis is used, blood cells should be sedimented, separated from the plasma, resuspended in saline solution and returned to the animals within 24 hours. Plasma separation should be performed in a designated room with a controlled environment.**
- **Plasma containers should be thoroughly cleaned on their external surfaces, adequately identified and stored in refrigerated rooms for further fractionation.**
- **Plasma should be checked prior to fractionation to establish compliance with relevant acceptance criteria for fractionation, in particular the neutralizing potency.**
- **Special attention should be paid to ensuring traceability between individual animal donors and the plasma pool.**

- **A certificate from a veterinarian or other qualified person should be issued stating that the donor animals were checked periodically to ensure that they were in good health at the time of plasma collection and during the follow-up observation period.**

13 PURIFICATION OF IMMUNOGLOBULINS AND IMMUNOGLOBULIN FRAGMENTS IN THE PRODUCTION OF ANTIVENOMS

13.1 Good manufacturing practices

The purification of immunoglobulins and immunoglobulin fragments for the production of antivenoms should aim at obtaining products of consistent quality, safety and efficacy. The fractionation processes used should adhere to the GMP principles developed for medicinal products. All operations should therefore be carried out in accordance with an appropriate quality assurance system and GMP. This covers all stages leading to the finished antivenoms, including the production of water, the production of plasma (animal selection and health control, production of venoms and immunization protocols, containers used for blood and plasma collection, anticoagulant solutions and quality control methods) and the purification, storage, transport, processing, quality control and delivery of the finished product. Of particular relevance is the control of microbiological risks, contamination with particulates and pyrogens, and the existence of a documentation system that ensures the traceability of all production steps. To establish satisfactory traceability of the antivenom produced, all the steps of the purification procedure used for the preparation of the antivenom batch should be recorded carefully in pre-established and approved batch record documents, and sampling should be done at established critical steps for in-process quality control tests.

WHO *Guidelines on good manufacturing practices for medicinal products* are available (59) and the main principles of GMP for the manufacture of blood plasma products of human origin have also been published (60, 61). These Guidelines can serve as a general guide for manufacturing practices in the production of antivenoms. A useful reference in the field of antivenoms is also the *Note for guidance on production and quality control of animal immunoglobulins and immunosera for human use* (CPMP/BWP/3354/99) (62).

13.2 Purification of the active substance

Antivenoms are prepared from the starting plasma pool using diverse methods to obtain one of the following active substances:

- intact IgG molecules;
- F(ab')₂ fragments; or
- Fab fragments.

In general, fractionation procedures should not impair the neutralizing activity of antibodies; it should yield a product of acceptable physicochemical characteristics and purity with a low content of protein aggregates, which is non-pyrogenic and which should provide good recovery of antibody activity.

The characteristics of a batch of plasma to be fractionated should be clearly established, and the methods used to purify the active substance and the in-process controls should be described in detail in standard operating procedures. In the following sections, examples of basic protocols used for the production of IgG, F(ab')₂ and Fab antivenoms are described. Some additional methodologies introduced to further purify the active substance of antivenoms are also discussed. Variations in these manufacturing procedures have often been developed by individual

fractionators and should be considered as acceptable when shown to yield consistently safe and effective preparations of antivenoms.

13.2.1 Purification of intact IgG antivenoms

13.2.1.1 Ammonium sulfate precipitation

In the past, most laboratories have used fractionation protocols based on salting-out procedures employing ammonium sulfate or sodium sulfate (63). Two precipitation steps are included using two different salt concentrations in addition to the elimination of “euglobulins” by precipitation in a diluted acidic solution.

Such fractionation protocols generally lead to a recovery of antibodies of between 40 and 50% and to the formation of protein aggregates. The final product of this procedure used to contain a relatively high proportion of contaminating proteins, such as albumin (64). This compromised the safety of the product, since a high incidence of early adverse reactions has been described in response to such intact IgG antivenoms (65).

13.2.1.2 Caprylic acid precipitation

The use of caprylic acid (octanoic acid) as an agent for precipitating proteins from animal plasma has been described in the literature (66). Several procedures for the purification of whole IgG antivenoms with a good physicochemical profile and purity using caprylic acid precipitation of non-immunoglobulin proteins have been developed (64, 67, 68) and are now used for the production of licensed antivenoms.

Figure 3 illustrates a particular process in which caprylic acid is added slowly to undiluted plasma, with constant stirring, to reach a concentration of 5% (v/v) and pH 5.5. The mixture is stirred at 22–25 °C for a minimum of 1 hour. The precipitated proteins are removed by filtration or centrifugation and discarded. The filtrate or the supernatant containing the immunoglobulins is then submitted to tangential flow filtration to remove residual caprylic acid and low-molecular-mass proteins, depending on the molecular cut-off of the ultrafiltration membranes, and to concentrate the proteins. The immunoglobulin solution is then formulated by adding sodium chloride solution (NaCl), an antimicrobial agent and any other excipient(s) needed, such as stabilizers. The pH is then adjusted to a neutral value and finally subjected to sterile filtration through a filter of pore size 0.22 µm, and dispensed into final containers (vials or ampoules). Variations of this procedure have been introduced by various manufacturers, and include dilution of plasma, changes in caprylic acid concentration, pH, and temperature among others.

Caprylic acid fractionation allows the production of antivenoms of relatively high purity and with a low protein aggregate content, because the immunoglobulins are not precipitated. The yield may reach up to 60–75% of the activity in the starting plasma, depending upon the details of the procedure and/or the equipment used. The efficacy and safety profiles of caprylic acid-fractionated antivenom immunoglobulins have been demonstrated in clinical trials (65, 69).

Fractionation of plasma for purification of IgG

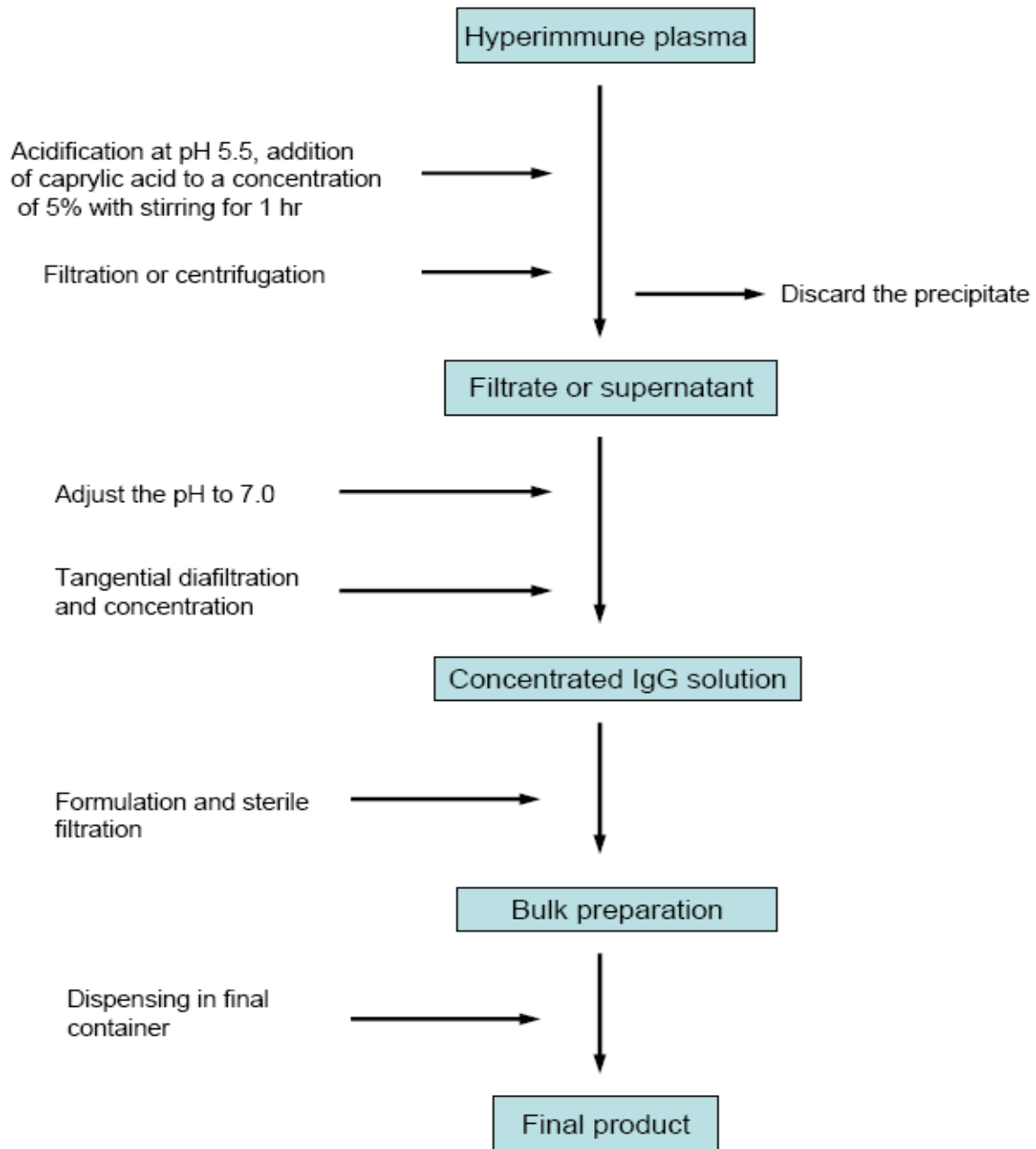


Figure 3

Example of a fractionation process in which intact IgG is prepared by caprylic acid precipitation of non-immunoglobulin proteins

13.2.2 Purification of $F(ab')_2$ antivenoms

Many manufacturers follow the classical protocol for $F(ab')_2$ antivenom production developed by Pope (6, 7), with a number of recent modifications (9, 10, 70).

The method of pepsin digestion (see Figure 4) involves the digestion of horse plasma proteins by pepsin, leading to the degradation of many non-IgG proteins, and to the cleavage of IgG into bivalent $F(ab')_2$ fragments by removal and digestion of the Fc fragment into small peptides. A heating step and the purification of $F(ab')_2$ fragments by salting-out using ammonium sulfate are also key elements of this methodology. Some procedures involve performing the pepsin digestion step on a pre-purified IgG fraction that is obtained by treatment of plasma with ammonium sulfate to obtain an IgG-enriched precipitate, whereas albumin is not precipitated.

Pepsin digestion is accomplished at a pH of 3.0–3.5. A typical protocol is based on incubation at pH 3.3 for 1 hour, at 30–37 °C in a jacketed tank, with a pepsin concentration of 1 g/l. Other procedures can be used which give similar results. Each manufacturer should adjust the pepsin concentration to achieve the required enzymatic activity.

13.2.2.1 Downstream processing using ammonium sulfate

After pepsin digestion, the pH is adjusted to 4.5–5.0, by adding NaOH or a weak alkaline buffer; then ammonium sulfate is added with stirring to a final concentration usually close to 12% (w:v). The precipitate is eliminated by filtration or centrifugation, and the filtrate, or supernatant, is heat-treated (usually at 56 °C for 1 hour; this is known as “thermocoagulation”). After thermocoagulation, the preparation is cooled down to less than 30 °C, e.g. by passing cold water through a jacketed vessel. The resulting fraction is filtered or centrifuged to remove the precipitate. The pH is then adjusted to 7.0–7.2 with NaOH, and a solution of ammonium sulfate is added with stirring to a final concentration high enough to precipitate the $F(ab')_2$ fragments (usually 23% (w:v) or higher). After an additional filtration step, or following centrifugation, the $F(ab')_2$ precipitate is dissolved, and then desalted (to remove the ammonium sulfate) and concentrated preferentially by tangential flow diafiltration. Care should be taken to avoid aggregate formation by ensuring gentle mixing and rapid dissolving of the precipitate. Alternatively, the 23% (w:v) step is bypassed by some manufacturers and, directly after the heating step, the filtrate obtained is subjected to ultrafiltration. Additional precipitation could also be applied on the starting material at a low ionic strength and acid pH to remove “euglobulins” (10).

The $F(ab')_2$ solution is then formulated by adding NaCl, an antimicrobial agent, and any other excipient needed for formulation, such as protein stabilizers, and the pH is adjusted, generally to a neutral value. Finally, the preparation is sterilized by filtration through 0.22- μ m filters, and dispensed into final containers (vials or ampoules). Such a process, or similar ones developed by other manufacturers, using pepsin digestion, ammonium sulfate precipitation and tangential diafiltration is the most often used for the manufacture of $F(ab')_2$ fragments. The yield of this fractionation protocol usually ranges between 30% and 40%.

13.2.2.2 Downstream processing using caprylic acid

Purification of $F(ab')_2$ has also been shown, on an experimental scale, to be achievable by caprylic acid precipitation of non- $F(ab')_2$ proteins after pepsin digestion, with an improved yield (~60%) (71). However, the yield obtained on a large scale has not been reported. Figure 5 shows a fractionation scheme of $F(ab')_2$ using caprylic acid. $F(ab')_2$ is not precipitated, therefore reducing the formation of aggregates. Some manufacturers have introduced additional processing steps such as ion-exchange chromatography or ultrafiltration to eliminate low-molecular-mass contaminants.

Fractionation of plasma for purification of F(ab')₂ fragments

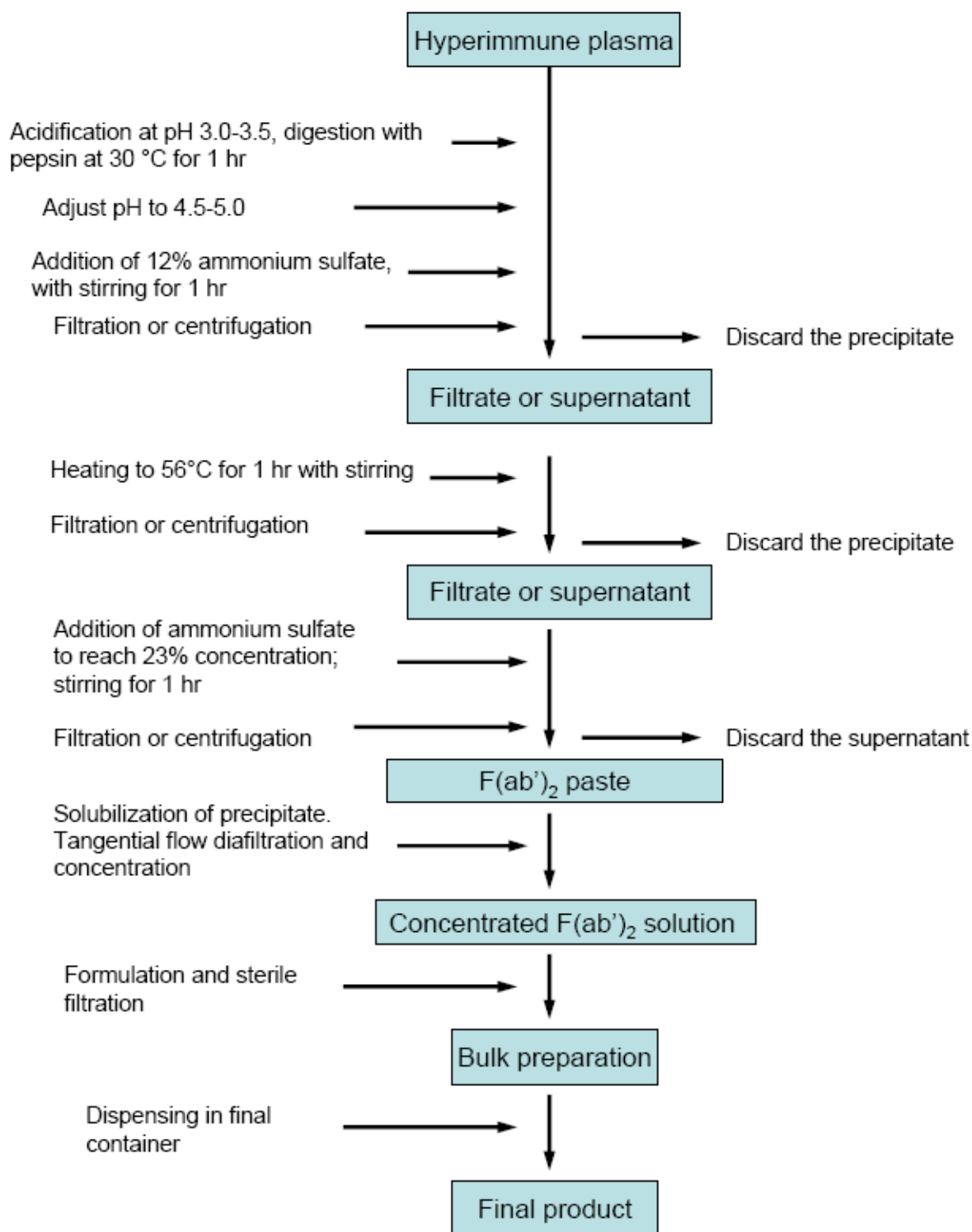


Figure 4
Example of a fractionation process in which F(ab')₂ fragments are prepared by pepsin digestion and ammonium sulfate precipitation

Fractionation of plasma for purification of F(ab')₂ fragments

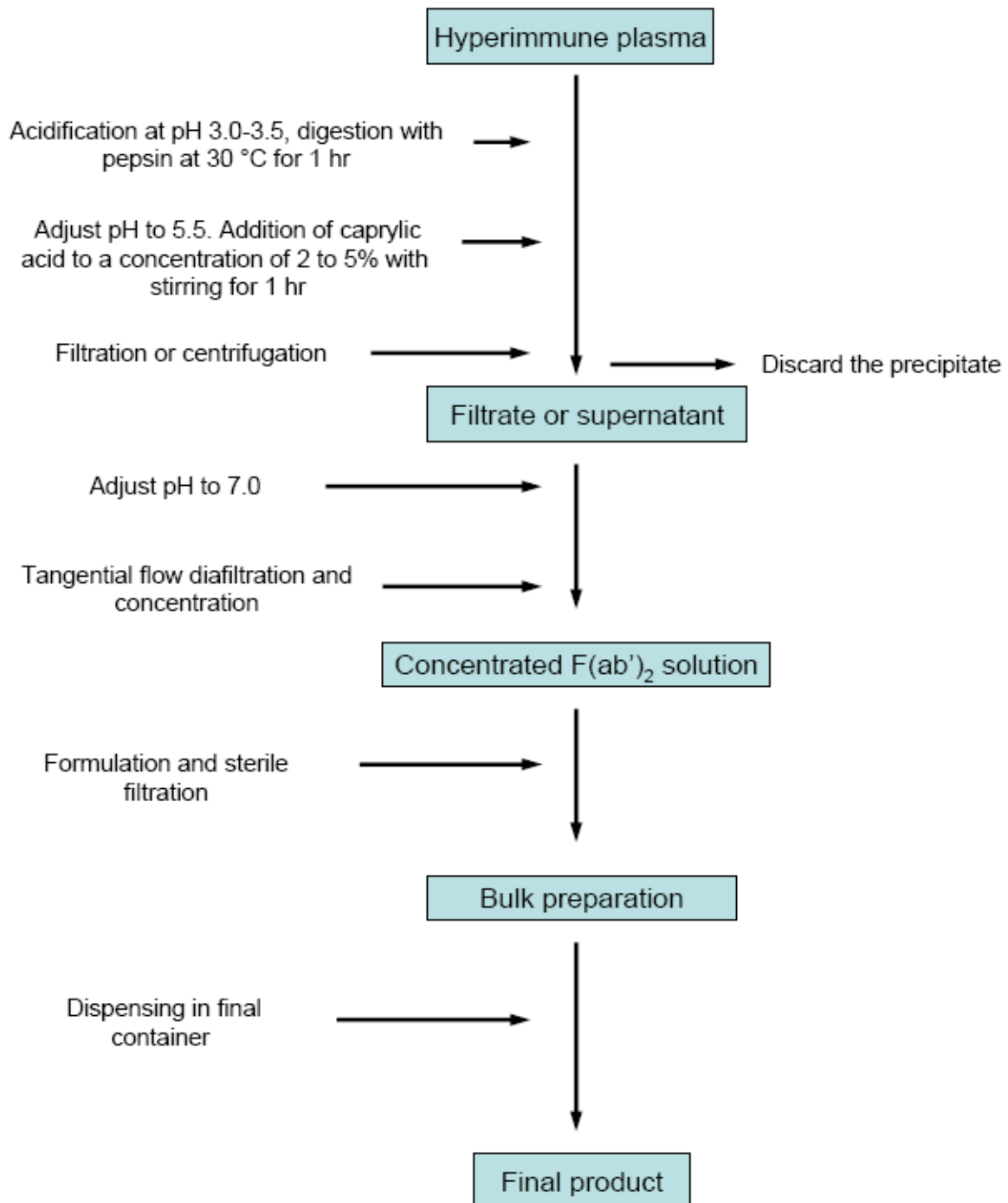


Figure 5

Example of a fractionation process in which F(ab')₂ fragments are prepared by pepsin digestion and caprylic acid precipitation

13.2.3 Purification of Fab antivenoms

Production of monovalent Fab fragments is performed by some manufacturers (72), currently using hyperimmunized sheep plasma. Papain is used to carry out the enzymatic digestion, and the process of preparation of the fragment may use ammonium sulfate, sodium sulfate or caprylic acid.

Figure 6 shows a process in which immunoglobulins are precipitated from plasma by adding ammonium sulfate or sodium sulfate to a concentration of 23%. After filtration the filtrate is discarded and the immunoglobulin precipitate is dissolved in a sodium chloride solution at pH 7.4. Papain is added and digestion performed at 37 °C for 18–20 hours in a jacketed tank. Reaction is stopped by adding iodoacetamide. The product is then applied to a diafiltration system to remove iodoacetamide, salts and low-molecular-mass peptides and equilibrated with a buffered isotonic NaCl solution. The preparation is then chromatographed on an anion-exchanger (usually in quaternary aminoethyl (QAE)-based or diethylaminoethyl (DEAE)-based media). Fc fragments and other impurities are bound on the column, whereas Fab fragments pass through. After an additional diafiltration/dialysis step, the product is formulated by adding NaCl, antimicrobial agents, when used and any other excipients needed, and the pH is adjusted. Finally, the preparation is sterile-filtered and dispensed into the final containers.

13.2.4 Optional additional steps used by some manufacturers

When performed following GMP and using validated fractionation protocols, the basic methodologies described above for the manufacture of IgG, F(ab')₂ and Fab antivenoms allow the production of antivenoms of adequate purity, safety and efficacy. Nevertheless, some manufacturers include additional steps to enhance product purity. The methodologies include those described below.

13.2.4.1 Ion-exchange chromatography

Ion-exchange chromatography can be successfully used for antivenom purification based on charge differential with the contaminants. Anion-exchange columns of DEAE or QAE gels or membranes, such as quaternary ammonium cellulose microporous membranes, can be used at neutral pH to adsorb protein contaminants (10, 70, 73). Alternatively, cation-exchange columns, e.g. carboxymethyl or sulfopropyl gels, have been used for purification of IgG or F(ab')₂ fragments (71). The column is equilibrated at acid pH, e.g. pH 4.5, to bind the antivenom, whereas protein contaminants are eluted in the break-through.

Chromatographic procedures should be applied following GMP. Columns should be adequately regenerated, sanitized, and stored to prolong their useful lifetime. The reproducibility of columns over cycles should be validated. Measures to avoid batch to batch contamination should be in place. Specific standard operating procedures should be developed and followed.

13.2.4.2 Affinity chromatography

Affinity chromatography using either immobilized venom or other ligands can be designed to bind immunoglobulins or their fragments (74). However, columns usually deteriorate rather rapidly, and meticulous care should be taken to wash, sanitize and store them under appropriate conditions. Procedures should be followed to ensure that any substances leaching from the columns do not affect the quality and safety of the product or else are completely removed during downstream processing; this is especially critical in affinity chromatography using immobilized venom. Affinity processes may affect recovery and high-affinity antibodies may be lost and/or denatured owing to the harsh elution conditions needed to elute them from the chromatographic material.

Fractionation of plasma for purification of Fab fragments

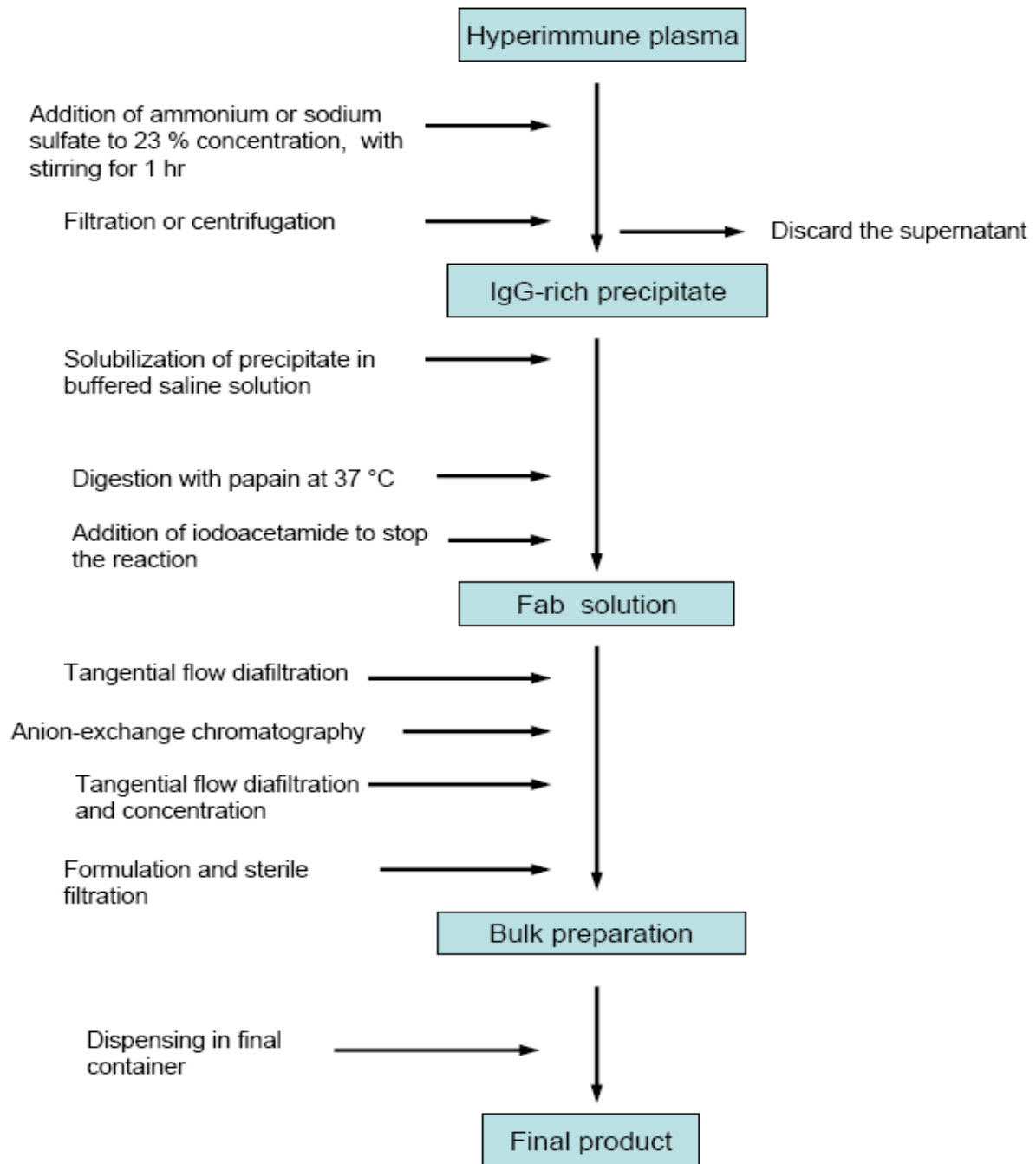


Figure 6

Example of a fractionation process in which Fab fragments are prepared by papain digestion and ammonium sulfate precipitation

13.2.4.3 Process improvement

Some manufacturers have introduced process improvements to enhance the quality or the yield of antivenoms. These include the use of a depth filtration system combined with filter-aids to facilitate filtration steps and improve antivenom recovery. In addition, other manufacturing steps may be introduced to ensure inactivation or removal of infectious agents (see section 14).

13.2.5 Formulation

During formulation of antivenoms after diafiltration steps one should consider the addition of salts to adjust the osmolality, addition of preservatives, other excipients, if needed for protein stability, and the adjustment of pH.

In general, antivenoms are formulated at neutral pH (pH 7.0 ± 0.5) although some manufacturers are exploring the feasibility of formulation at more acidic pH to improve stability and/or to reduce aggregate formation.

Formulation at pH higher than 7.5 is not recommended, since the stability of immunoglobulins and their fragments at alkaline pH may be poor, and the formation of aggregates may be favoured.

13.2.6 Analysis of bulk product before dispensing

The biological, physical and chemical characteristics of the final bulk product should meet pre-established specifications before dispensing. Analysis may include tests required to demonstrate:

- the purity and potency of the product;
- the sterility;
- the compliance with the specifications for the aggregate content;
- the pyrogen limit and/or the bacterial endotoxin content; and
- the formulation.

When the product is formulated in liquid form, some of these tests (such as the potency assay) may not need to be duplicated on the final container if the processing after the bulk preparation has been validated and shown not to alter this activity.

The sterilization equipment and the integrity of the membrane should be guaranteed before sterilization; moreover, the aseptic filling should be validated.

13.2.7 Dispensing and labelling of final product

Once compliance of the final bulk product with the quality control specifications is established, the final product is bottled. For this, final glass containers (vials or ampoules) should be used. General principles prevailing for the dispensing of parenteral medicinal products should be applied. The dispensing should be performed in class A (59) clean room conditions, usually under a laminar flow hood. The equipment used for dispensing should be calibrated beforehand to ensure that the correct volume is delivered.

In the case of ampoules, the dispensing system should ensure an aseptic closure and the sealing of the ampoule should prevent risk of protein denaturation due to heat. For vials, insertion of rubber stoppers should be done inside this clean dispensing area. The quality of the rubber stoppers should be such as to guarantee inertness and to prevent leaching. Thereafter, aluminium seals should be placed on each vial in a clean area outside the class A area. Ampoules or vials containing the final product should then be properly identified and stored in a quarantine area

maintained under proper storage conditions. Samples of the antivenoms should be sent to the quality control laboratory for analysis.

When an antivenom complies with all the quality control tests established for the final product, it should be properly labelled and identified. The vial or ampoule should be labelled with, at least, the following information:

- name of the product and of the producer;
- animal species used to produce the antivenom;
- batch number;
- pharmaceutical presentation (liquid or freeze-dried);
- volume content;
- administration route;
- specificity (venoms neutralized by the antivenom, including both the common and the scientific name of the snake(s)¹);
- neutralizing potency;
- storage conditions; and
- expiry date.

Additional information may be requested by the national regulatory authorities. The package, which is usually a cardboard box, in which the vials or ampoules are packed, should include the same information as is given on the primary container. The package insert should include all the information relating to the product, as established by national regulatory agencies, including:

- the neutralizing potency;
- the recommended dosage;
- reconstitution procedure, if lyophilized;
- the mode of administration (e.g. the dilution of antivenom in a carrier fluid such as saline);
- the rate of administration;
- details on the symptoms and treatment of early and delayed adverse reactions;
- snake species against which the antivenom is effective;
- recommended storage conditions, and
- an indication that the product is for single use.

13.2.8 Use of preservatives

The addition of preservatives to prevent bacterial and fungal contamination should be kept to a minimum during plasma storage and during fractionation. Their inclusion during the manufacturing process should be clearly justified, and should never substitute for any aspect of GMP. Preservatives can be considered in the final product, especially if it is manufactured in liquid form, and most specifically preservatives are required for multiple-dose presentations. Antimicrobial agents currently used in antivenom formulation include phenol and cresols. In

¹ Special care should be taken considering the frequent changes in snake species taxonomy.

general, phenol concentration is adjusted to 2.5 g/l, and concentration of cresols should be less than 3.5 g/l. The concentration of preservatives should be validated by each production laboratory on the basis of assays to test their efficacy and keeping in mind that they may degrade with time and cease to be effective. It is necessary to ascertain that any agent used has no potential detrimental interaction with the active substance and excipients of antivenoms. Any change in the formulation involving preservatives, or the elimination of preservatives from the final product, requires a very careful risk–benefit assessment on various microbial safety aspects, as well as a detailed validation procedure. Mercury-containing preservatives are not recommended in antivenom manufacture. The volume of antivenom required for the treatment of envenoming (in excess of 50 ml) might lead to an exposure to mercury far higher than the amounts currently used for other biological preparations and levels at which they are toxic, especially in young children, are not known (75, 76).

13.2.9 Freeze-drying

Antivenoms are available either as liquid or as freeze-dried preparations. Freeze-dried antivenoms, which may usually be stored at a temperature not exceeding 25 °C, are generally distributed to markets where the cold chain cannot be guaranteed, such as in many tropical regions of the world. The absence of guarantee of a cold chain during distribution highlights the need for manufacturers to demonstrate the stability of the antivenoms under the high temperatures found in tropical climates.

Freeze-drying is a critical operation. Careful attention should be given to the rate of freezing as well as to the protocol used for the primary and secondary drying cycles (77). The details of the freeze-drying protocols are product-specific and should be adjusted according to the particular formulation of each antivenom. Inadequate freeze-drying protocols may affect the physicochemical quality of the product, inducing protein precipitation and denaturation, as well as aggregate formation, and altering stability and reconstitution. Specific stabilizers, such as sugars or polyols, aimed at protecting proteins from denaturation and aggregation, may be added to the final formulation of the antivenom. Bulking agents, frequently used for some biological products, are generally not required in the case of antivenoms owing to their relatively high protein concentration; however they are sometimes used for high-titre monospecific antivenoms.

13.2.10 Inspection of final container

All the vials or ampoules of each batch of liquid antivenoms should be inspected, either visually, or using a mechanical device. Any vial or ampoule presenting turbidity, abnormal coloration, presence of particulate matter, or defects of the vial, stopper, or capsule should be discarded. In the case of freeze-dried products, a representative sample of the whole batch should be dissolved in the solvent and inspected as described. Turbidity can be assessed quantitatively by using a turbidimeter.

13.2.11 Archive samples of antivenoms

In compliance with GMP, manufacturing laboratories should archive a number of vials of each antivenom batch, under the recommended storage conditions, in an amount that would enable the repetition of all quality control tests, when required.

13.3 Pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic properties of IgG, F(ab')₂ and Fab

Owing to their different molecular mass, the pharmacokinetics of heterologous IgG molecules (approximately 150 kDa) and F(ab')₂ (approximately 100 kDa) and Fab (approximately 50 kDa) fragments differ significantly. In envenomed patients, Fab fragments have the largest volume of distribution and readily reach extravascular compartments. Fab fragments are, however, rapidly eliminated, mainly by renal excretion, thus having a short elimination half-life (from 4–24 hours) (78, 79). In contrast, F(ab')₂ fragments and intact IgG molecules are not eliminated by the renal route and therefore have a more prolonged elimination half-life (between 2 and 4 days) (11, 80, 81). Such different pharmacokinetic profiles have important pharmacodynamic implications, and the selection of the ideal type of active substance in an antivenom should rely on a careful analysis of the venom toxicokinetics and antivenom pharmacokinetics.

Another difference between low-molecular-mass fragments, such as Fab and those with a higher molecular mass, such as F(ab')₂ and IgG, is the number of paratopes of each molecule: Fab has one antigen binding site while IgG and F(ab')₂ each have two binding sites. Thus they will be able to form large and stable complexes or precipitates with antigens carrying several epitopes, while the former will form small, reversible non-precipitable complexes.

Ideally, the volume of distribution of an antivenom should be as similar as possible to the volume of distribution of the main toxins in a particular venom; however, this is rarely the case. In venoms composed of low-molecular-mass toxins, such as some elapid snake venoms, low-molecular-mass neurotoxins are rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream and are rapidly distributed to the extravascular spaces where toxin targets are located. Furthermore, low-molecular-mass toxins are eliminated from the body in a few hours. In these cases, an antivenom of high distribution volume that readily reaches extravascular spaces, such as Fab, might be convenient, although its action is then eliminated within a few hours. It should be noted, however, that a number of elapid venoms contain some high-molecular-mass toxins of great clinical significance, such as procoagulants and pre-synaptic neurotoxins.

In contrast, in the case of viperid snake venoms and other venoms made up of toxins of larger molecular mass, including a number of elapid venoms, many of which act intravascularly to provoke bleeding and coagulopathy, the situation is different. The time required for toxins to distribute to extravascular spaces is longer than in the case of low-molecular-mass neurotoxins, and the targets of some of these toxins are present in the vascular compartment. In addition, the toxins of viperid venoms have a long half-life *in vivo* and can remain in the body for several days (82, 83). In this case, an antivenom made by Fab fragments neutralizes the toxins that reach the circulation but, after a certain time has elapsed, the Fab fragments are eliminated and non-neutralized toxins reach the circulation, thus giving rise to the well-known phenomenon of recurrent envenoming, i.e. the reappearance of signs and symptoms of envenoming at later time intervals after an initial control of envenoming. This situation demands repeated administration of antivenom to maintain therapeutic levels of Fab in the circulation (84). Therefore, in such envenomings, antivenoms made of IgG or F(ab')₂ may be more appropriate because of their longer elimination half-lives. Moreover, it has been proposed that formation of venom–antivenom complexes in the circulation results in the redistribution of venom components from the extravascular space to the blood compartment, where they are bound and neutralized by circulating antivenom, provided that the dose of antivenom is sufficient (85, 86). Consequently, the maintenance of a high concentration of specific antivenom antibodies in the circulation for many hours is required for complete neutralization of toxins reaching the bloodstream during both early and late phases of envenoming (redistribution of toxins) present in the extravascular space. In conclusion, IgG and F(ab')₂ antivenoms have a pharmacokinetic profile that makes them more effective in many types of snakebite envenoming.

13.4 Main recommendations

- **Antivenoms should be manufactured using fractionation procedures that are well established, validated, and shown to yield products with proven safety and efficacy. Fractionation processes used for the manufacture of antivenoms should adhere to the principles of GMP for parenteral medicinal products.**
- **Antivenoms can be comprised of intact IgG molecules, F(ab')₂ fragments or Fab fragments. Intact IgG antivenoms are mainly produced by caprylic acid precipitation of non-IgG plasma proteins, leaving a highly purified IgG preparation in the supernatant or filtrate.**
- **F(ab')₂ fragment antivenoms are produced by pepsin digestion of plasma proteins, at acidic pH, usually followed by F(ab')₂ purification by salting out with ammonium sulfate solutions or by caprylic acid precipitation. Fab monovalent fragments are obtained by papain digestion of IgG at neutral pH.**
- **Further to ultrafiltration to remove low-molecular-mass contaminants, preparations are formulated, sterilized by filtration and dispensed in the final containers. Formulations of antivenoms may include preservative agents.**
- **Antivenoms can be presented as liquid or freeze-dried preparations. Freeze-drying of antivenoms should be performed in conditions that ensure no denaturation of proteins and no formation of protein aggregates.**
- **IgG, F(ab')₂ and Fab antivenoms exhibit different pharmacokinetic profiles: Fab fragments have a larger distribution volume and a much shorter elimination half-life. Thus, for viperid envenomings, IgG or F(ab')₂ antivenoms have a more suitable pharmacokinetic profile, whereas Fab fragments may be useful for the neutralization of venoms rich in low-molecular-mass neurotoxins which are rapidly distributed to the tissues. However, in general terms, IgG and F(ab')₂ antivenoms have shown a better pharmacokinetic profile than Fab antivenoms.**

14 CONTROL OF INFECTIOUS RISKS

14.1 Background

The viral safety of any biological product results from a combination of measures to ensure a minimal risk of viral contamination in the starting material (e.g. plasma), together with steps to inactivate or remove potential contaminating viruses during processing.

There are currently several recognized complementary approaches used for virus risk reduction for biological products. These are:

- minimizing the potential initial virus content by implementing a quality system for the production of the starting material;
- contribution of the manufacturing processes to inactivating and/or removing residual viruses during manufacture of the biological product; such a contribution can be inherent to the existing production technology or may result from the introduction of dedicated viral reduction steps;
- adhesion to GMP at all steps of the manufacturing process;
- appropriate and timely response to any infectious events recognized during the clinical use of the product.

Production steps to inactivate and/or remove viruses have long been shown to play a powerful role in ensuring safety of biologicals (60). Similarly, keeping to a minimum the potential viral load at the stage of the plasma pool, through appropriate epidemiological surveillance and health control of the donor animals, is also an important safety measure (see section 10).

Based on experience with human plasma products, a production process for antivenoms that includes two robust steps for viral reduction (comprising preferably at least one viral inactivation step) should provide a satisfactory level of viral safety. However, it should be kept in mind that non-enveloped viruses are more difficult to inactivate or remove than lipid-enveloped viruses.

14.2 Risk of viral contamination of the starting plasma

The main structural characteristics of viruses reported to possibly infect horses, sheep and goats are presented in Tables 7 and 8. They include viruses with a DNA or RNA genome, with and without a lipid envelope, and varying widely in size (22 to 300 nm).

A few of these viruses have been identified as possibly present, at least at some stages of the infection cycle, in the blood, or are considered as being pathogenic to humans. Special attention should be paid to these viruses.

14.3 Viral validation of manufacturing processes

Understanding how much a manufacturing process may contribute to the viral safety of antivenoms is fundamental to both manufacturers and regulators. Such an understanding can only be achieved by viral validation studies. These studies are complex and require well-established virology laboratory infrastructure and cell culture methodologies. They are usually carried out by specialized laboratories, outside the manufacturing facilities.

The principles guiding such studies have been described in WHO Guidelines (60) and are summarized below.

14.3.1 Down-scale experiments

The contribution of manufacturing processes towards inactivation and/or removal of potential viral contamination should be demonstrated. For this purpose, viral validation studies should be performed using at least three viruses exhibiting different structural characteristics. The antivenom manufacturer should first identify the steps that, based on the existing literature, are likely to remove or inactivate viruses and, then, provide evidence and quantitative assessment of the extent of virus reduction achieved for the specific process evaluated.

Validation should be done by down-scale experiments. The accuracy of the down-scale process should be assessed by comparing the characteristics of the starting intermediate and the fraction resulting from that step, for both the laboratory and the production scales. Selected physical factors (e.g. temperature, stirring or filtration conditions) and chemical factors (e.g. pH or concentration of precipitating agents such as caprylic acid) should be as close as possible to those used at manufacturing scale.

Table 7

Viruses identified in horses (62, 87)

Virus	Family	Size (nm)	Genome	Presence in blood reported^a	Classified as pathogenic to humans (62)
Lipid-enveloped viruses					
Borna virus ^b	Bornaviridae	70–130	ss-RNA	Yes	
Equine arteritis virus	Arteriviridae	50–60	ss-RNA		
Equine encephalitis virus, Eastern and Western	Togaviridae	40–70	ss-RNA		Yes
Equine coronavirus	Coronaviridae	75–160	ss-RNA		
Equine foamy virus	Retroviridae	80–100	ss-RNA	Yes	
Equine herpes virus 1–5	Herpesviridae	125–150	Ds-DNA		Yes
Equine infectious anaemia virus	Lentiviridae	80–100	ss-RNA	Yes	
Equine influenza virus	Orthomyxoviridae	80–120	ss-RNA		Yes
Equine morbillivirus (Hendra virus)	Paramyxoviridae	150	ss-RNA		Yes
Japanese encephalitis virus	Flaviviridae	40–70	ss-RNA		Yes
Nipah virus	Paramyxoviridae	150–300	ss-RNA		Yes
Rabies virus	Rhabdoviridae	75–180	ss-RNA		Yes
Salem virus	Paramyxoviridae	150–300	ss-RNA		
St Louis encephalitis virus	Flaviviridae	40–70	ss-RNA		Yes
Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus	Togaviridae	40–70	ss-RNA	Yes	Yes
Vesicular stomatitis virus	Rhabdoviridae	50–80	ss-RNA	Yes	Yes
West Nile virus	Flaviviridae	40–70	ss-RNA	Yes	Yes
Non-lipid enveloped viruses					
Equine encephalosis viruses	Reoviridae	80	Ds-RNA		
Equine rhinitis A and B viruses	Picornaviridae	22–30	ss-RNA		
Equine rotavirus	Reoviridae	60–80	Ds-RNA		

^a Absence of a report does not mean that the virus may not be found in the blood at certain stages of the cycle of infection.

^b Recent studies have suggested that Borna virus is non-pathogenic to humans (88).

Table 8
Viruses identified in sheep and goats (62)

Virus	Family	Size (nm)	Genome	Reported presence in blood ^a	Classified as pathogenic to humans (62)
Lipid-enveloped viruses					
Adenovirus	Adenoviridae	80–110	ds-DNA		
Akabane virus	Bunyaviridae	80–120	ss-RNA		
Bluetongue virus	Reoviridae	80	ds-RNA		Yes
Border disease virus	Flaviviridae	40–70	ss-RNA		
Borna virus ^b	Bornaviridae	70–130	ss-RNA	Yes	
Bovine herpes virus types 1, 2, 4	Herpesviridae	120–200	ds-DNA		
Bovine viral diarrhoea virus	Togaviridae	40–60	ss-RNA		
Loiping ill virus	Flaviviridae	40–50	ss-RNA		Yes
Nairobi sheep disease	Bunyaviridae	80–120	ss-RNA		
Ovine/bovine papillomavirus	Papillomaviridae	40–55	ds-DNA		
Ovine herpes virus 2	Herpesviridae	120–200	ds-DNA		
Parainfluenza virus type 3	Paramyxoviridae	150–300	ss-RNA		Yes
Peste des petits ruminants (Morbillivirus)	Paramyxoviridae	150–300	ss-RNA		
Poxviruses (Parapox, Capripox, Cowpox)	Poxviridae	140–260	ds-DNA		Yes
Respiratory syncytial virus	Paramyxoviridae	150–300	ss-RNA		
Retroviruses (Caprine arthritis encephalitis virus, Maedi-Visna virus, Jaagsiekte virus, Bovine leukaemia virus)	Retroviridae	80–100	ss-RNA		
Rift Valley fever complex	Bunyaviridae	80–120	ss-RNA		Yes
Ross river virus	Togaviridae	70	ss-RNA		
Rotavirus	Reoviridae	80	ds-RNA		
Tick-borne encephalitis virus	Flaviviridae	40–50	ss-RNA		Yes
Vesicular stomatitis virus	Rhabdoviridae	50–380	ss-RNA	Yes	Yes
Wesselbron virus	Flaviviridae	40–50	ss-RNA		Yes
Non-lipid enveloped viruses					
Epizootic haemorrhagic disease virus	Reoviridae	80	ds-RNA		
Foot and mouth disease virus	Picornaviridae	27–30	ss-RNA		Yes
Reovirus 1-3	Reoviridae	60–80	ds-RNA		

^a Absence of report does not mean that the virus may not be found in the blood at certain stages of the cycle of infection.

^b Recent studies have suggested that Borna virus is non-pathogenic to humans (88).

Once the step is accurately modelled, the antivenom fraction derived from the fractionation process just prior to the step being evaluated (e.g. the starting plasma to be subjected to a low pH treatment, or to caprylic acid precipitation, or a F(ab')₂ fragment fraction to be subjected to an ammonium sulfate-heat treatment) should be spiked with one of the model viruses selected. Viral infectivity, most often determined using cell culture assays (less frequently animal models), should be quantified before (e.g. prior to pH adjustment and addition of pepsin) and immediately after (e.g. following low pH adjustment and incubation at that pH for a known period of time in the presence of pepsin) the steps evaluated to determine the viral clearance achieved. The results are conventionally expressed as logarithm (log) of the reduction in infectivity that is observed. Total infectivity or viral load is calculated as the infectious titre (infectious units per ml) multiplied by the volume. For a viral inactivation step, it is highly recommended that the kinetics of the virus kill be evaluated. Such inactivation kinetics of the infectivity provides an important indication of the virucidal potential of the step and enables comparison of the data obtained to those from published studies.

Typically, a viral reduction of 4 logs or more is considered to represent an effective and reliable viral safety step.

Establishing the relative insensitivity of a manufacturing step to changes or deviations in process conditions is also important to evaluate its robustness, in addition to adding to the level of understanding of its contribution to the overall viral safety of the preparation. This can be achieved by validating the same step using a range of conditions deviating from those used in production (such as an upper pH limit applied to a pepsin digestion or to a caprylic acid precipitation step).

Virus validation studies are subject to a number of limitations (60), which should be considered when interpreting the results.

14.3.2 Selection of viruses for the validation of antivenom production processes

Viruses selected for viral validation studies should resemble as closely as possible those which may be present in the starting animal plasma material (Tables 7 and 8). When possible, viruses known to potentially contaminate animal plasma (called “relevant viruses”) should be used.

Table 9 gives examples of a few viruses that have been used for the validation of animal-derived immunoglobulins. Vesicular stomatitis virus (VSV) and West Nile virus (WNV) are relevant lipid-enveloped horse plasma-borne viruses. Bovine viral diarrhoea virus (BVDV), a lipid-enveloped flavivirus, can be used as a model for West Nile virus (WNV) and for the Eastern, Western, and Venezuelan equine encephalitis togaviruses. Pseudorabies virus (PRV) is a lipid-enveloped virus that can serve as a model for pathogenic equine herpesvirus. Encephalomyocarditis virus (EMCV), a picornavirus, can serve as a model for non-lipid-enveloped viruses. Porcine parvovirus can also be selected as a model for small resistant non-lipid-enveloped viruses or as a relevant virus when pepsin of porcine origin is used in the manufacture of F(ab')₂ fragments.

This list is not exhaustive and other model viruses can be used for validation studies of animal-derived antivenoms, in particular taking into account the characteristics of the viruses that may be present in the animal species used to generate antivenoms.

Table 9

Examples of laboratory model viruses that can be used for validation studies of horse-derived antivenoms

Virus	Family	Lipid-enveloped	Size (nm)	Genome	Resistance	Model for
Animal Parvovirus (e.g. porcine)	Parvoviridae	No	18–26	SS-DNA	High	Relevant virus (when pepsin of porcine origin is used)
Bovine virus Diarrhoea virus	Togaviridae	Yes	40–60	ss-RNA	Low	Eastern, Western and Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus
Parainfluenza virus	Paramyxoviridae	Yes	100–200	ss-RNA	Low	Hendra virus; Nipah virus; Salem virus
Poliovirus; Encephalomyocarditis virus; Hepatitis A virus	Picornaviridae	No	25–30	ss-RNA	Medium-high	Equine rotavirus
Pseudorabies virus	Herpes	Yes	100–200	Ds-DNA	Medium	Equine herpes virus
Reovirus type 3	Reoviridae	No	60–80	Ds-RNA	Medium	Equine encephalosis virus
Sindbis virus	Togaviridae	Yes	60–70	ss-RNA	Low	Eastern, Western and Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus
Vesicular stomatitis virus	Rhabdoviridae	Yes	50–200	ss-RNA	Low	Relevant virus
West Nile virus	Flaviridae	Yes	40–70	ss-RNA	Low	Relevant virus and model for Eastern equine encephalitis virus

14.4 Viral validation studies of antivenom immunoglobulins

There is no documented case of transmission of zoonotic infections, including viral diseases, by antivenom immunoglobulins, or any other animal-derived immunoglobulins. Absence of reports of viral transmission may result from a lack of long-term surveillance of the patients receiving antivenoms. Alternatively, this may reveal that current processes for the manufacturing of antivenoms include processing steps that contribute to the viral safety.

Among the various processing steps used in the production of antivenoms, caprylic acid and low pH treatments are known to contribute to safety against lipid-enveloped viruses. This information is based on well-established experience in the fractionation of human plasma with a production step comprising caprylic acid (89–91) or low pH treatment (60, 92–94).

Although information is still limited, there is now growing evidence that similar steps used in the production of animal derived immunoglobulins may also inactivate or remove viruses. In addition, some manufacturers have implemented dedicated viral reduction procedures.

14.4.1 Caprylic acid treatment

The conditions used for caprylic acid treatment of antivenoms (87, 64) and of human immunoglobulins (89–91) are similar, in particular the pH range, duration of treatment, temperature, and the caprylic acid/protein ratio, as summarized in Table 10.

Table 10

Comparison of conditions for caprylic acid treatment used for human immunoglobulin preparations and antivenoms (87)

Product	Protein concentration (g/l)	Caprylic acid (g/kg solution)	pH	Temperature (°C)	Duration (hr)
Human IgG	35	7.45	5.5	22	1
Human IgM-enriched	43	15	4.8	20	1
Human IgM	25	20	5.0	20	1
Antivenoms	60–90	50	5.5–5.8	18–22	1

14.4.1.1 Validation studies with human immunoglobulins

Unsaturated fatty acids, most specifically caprylic acid, have long been known to have the capacity to inactivate lipid-enveloped viruses in human plasma protein fractions (95, 96). The non-ionized form of caprylic acid is thought to disrupt the lipid bilayer and membrane-associated proteins of enveloped viruses. Utilizing the dissociation reaction and varying the concentration of the ionized form of caprylate, a specific amount of the non-ionized form of caprylate can be maintained over a wide pH range.

The robustness of a caprylic acid treatment applied to human immunoglobulin G (IgG), human immunoglobulin M (IgM) and IgM-enriched preparations has been investigated using various enveloped viruses (human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), BVDV, Sindbis virus and Pseudorabies) (89). Under the conditions applied during manufacture, caprylic acid leads to robust inactivation of lipid-enveloped viruses; pH is a particularly critical parameter and should be less than 6.

Another investigation studied the viral reduction achieved during treatment by caprylate of a human IgG product (90). At pH 5.1, at 23 °C, and in the presence of 9 mM caprylate, ≥ 4.7 and ≥ 4.2 log of HIV and PRV, respectively, were inactivated during the 1-hour treatment, but only 1.5 log for BVDV was inactivated. At 12 mM caprylate, ≥ 4.4 log of BVDV were inactivated within this time period. At pH 5.1, 24 °C, and 19 mM caprylate, and pH 5.1, 24 °C, and 12 mM caprylate, complete inactivation of BVDV and of HIV and PRV was achieved in less than 3 min.

14.4.1.2 Validation studies with antivenom immunoglobulins

Virus inactivation studies have been carried out on a F(ab')₂ fraction obtained from pepsin digested plasma subjected to ammonium sulfate precipitation. The F(ab')₂ fraction was subjected to precipitation by drop-wise addition of caprylic acid to 0.5% (final concentration) and the mixture was maintained under vigorous stirring for 1 hour at 18 °C. Rapid and complete reduction of BVDV, PRV and VSV ($> 6.6 \log_{10}$, $> 6.6 \log_{10}$, and $> 7.0 \log_{10}$, respectively) was observed. No significant reduction ($0.7 \log_{10}$) of the non-enveloped EMCV (97) was observed.

In another process used to prepare equine immunoglobulins, in which serum is thawed at 4 °C, subjected to heating at 56 °C for 90 min, brought to 20 ± 5 °C, adjusted to pH 5.5 and subjected to 5% caprylic acid treatment for 1 hour, fast reduction of infectivity of > 4.32 and $> 4.65 \log_{10}$

was found for PRV and BVDV, respectively. The caprylic acid step was confirmed to have limited impact on the infectivity of EMCV and Minute virus of mice (MVM) non-lipid enveloped viruses (98). Data suggest that significant reduction in the infectivity of lipid-enveloped viruses can be obtained during caprylic acid treatment of antivenoms. The reduction of viral infectivity may result from both viral inactivation and partitioning during the precipitation step. No significant inactivation of non-enveloped viruses is expected.

14.4.1.3 Recommended actions

Further studies of the viral reduction achieved during caprylic acid treatment of antivenoms are recommended; in particular, robustness studies to define the impact on process variations should also be performed.

14.4.2 Acid pH treatment

The conditions used for low pH treatment of equine derived antivenom immunoglobulins and of human immunoglobulins are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11

Typical conditions for acid pH treatment of human IgG preparations and equine antivenoms (87)

Product	Protein concentration (g/l)	pH	Temperature (°C)	Duration (hrs)
Human IgG	40–60	4	30–37	20–30
Antivenoms	60–90	3.1–3.3	30–37	0.6–24

14.4.2.1 Validation studies with human immunoglobulins

Many studies have demonstrated that the low pH 4 treatment used in the manufacture of human intravenous IgG has the capacity to inactivate lipid-enveloped viruses (92–94). The rate and extent of inactivation may differ depending upon the virus. Inactivation is temperature-dependent, and is influenced by the formulation of the IgG solution. Pepsin is sometimes added in traces (to reduce anticomplementary activity and content of aggregates) but, at this low concentration, contributes little to virus kill (60). Most non-lipid enveloped viruses are resistant to acid pH treatment.

14.4.2.2 Virus inactivation studies performed with antivenom immunoglobulins

As described in section 13, peptic cleavage of horse plasma IgG at pH 3.0–3.3 for 60 min is a common procedure for the preparation of F(ab')₂. More than 4 logs of inactivation of WNV and of Sindbis has been found when horse plasma was subjected to peptic digestion at pH 3.2 for 60 min (99). WNV was very sensitive whether pepsin was added or not, whereas the rate and extent of inactivation of Sindbis was higher in the presence of pepsin. This suggests that pH 3.2 alone inactivates WNV, while other phenomena involving the action of pepsin contribute to Sindbis inactivation at low pH.

Confirmation of the significant inactivation of lipid-enveloped viruses during peptic cleavage of plasma at pH 3.2 was obtained by another group (97). In this process, plasma is diluted with two volumes of saline, pH is adjusted to 3.3, and pepsin is added to a final concentration of 1g/l. The mixture is incubated at pH 3.3 for 1 hour. Inactivation of PRV > 5.1 log₁₀ occurred in less than 6 minutes and > 7.0 log₁₀ in 60 min. There was > 3.1 log₁₀ and > 4.5 log₁₀ inactivation of VSV after 6 and 20 min, respectively. The reduction of infectivity of BVDV was less: 1.7 log₁₀ after 60 min. Inactivation of EMC, a non-enveloped virus, was relatively slow but reached between 2.5

and 5.7 log₁₀ after 60 min of pepsin incubation. This showed that reduction of infectivity of at least some non-lipid enveloped viruses may take place during peptic digestion of diluted horse plasma. This does not mean, however, that other non-lipid enveloped viruses would be inactivated to the same extent under such conditions.

14.4.2.3 Recommended actions

Manufacturers of F(ab')₂ antivenoms are encouraged to validate the pepsin digestion process since virus inactivation is likely to be influenced by pH, time, temperature, pepsin content, and protein content. Robustness studies to define the impact on process variations are also recommended.

14.4.3 Filtration steps

Other steps used in antivenom production may contribute to viral safety through non-specific viral removal. The virus removal capacity of two depth-filtration steps performed in the presence of filter aids and used in the production of equine derived immunoglobulins by ammonium sulfate precipitation of pepsin-digested IgG has been evaluated (100). Clearance factors of 5.7 and 4.0 log₁₀ have been found for two lipid-enveloped viruses (infectious bovine rhinotracheitis virus and canine distemper virus, respectively) and of 5.3 and 4.2 log₁₀ for two non-lipid enveloped viruses (canine adenovirus virus and poliovirus type I, respectively). However, it should be kept in mind that viral reductions obtained by non-dedicated removal steps are usually regarded as less robust than those resulting from dedicated viral inactivation or removal steps (60).

14.4.4 Validation of dedicated viral reduction treatments

14.4.4.1 Pasteurization

Pasteurization is defined as the treatment of a liquid protein fraction for 10 hours, usually at 60 °C. It is a well-established viral inactivation treatment of human plasma products, such as immunoglobulin G (60). It is being used in the production process of a few equine-derived immunoglobulins (10).

Validation studies showed that heating a purified equine immunoglobulin at 58 °C ± 0.1 °C without stabilizers inactivates ≥ 4.8 log₁₀ of PRV and ≥ 4.3 log₁₀ of BVDV in less than 30 min, and > 4.7 log of EMCV in less than 1 hour. In contrast, infectivity of MVM, a non-enveloped virus, was still detected after 9 h and 30 min of treatment; only 1.59 log₁₀ were inactivated (98).

14.4.4.2 Nanofiltration

Nanofiltration is a technique of filtration specifically designed to remove viruses, based on size, while permitting flow-through of the desired protein (101). Effective viral removal requires, in principle, that the pore size of the filter be smaller than the effective diameter of the virus particles.

14.4.5 Other viral inactivation treatments currently not used in antivenom manufacture

Other methods of viral inactivation have been developed to ensure the viral safety of biological products. These include, in particular, a treatment with a combination of an organic solvent (tri-*n*-butyl phosphate or TnBP) at concentrations between 0.3 and 1%, and detergents such as Triton X-100 or Tween 80, also at concentrations generally between 0.3% and 1%. Such solvent–detergent (S/D) procedures have proven to be very efficient and robust in the inactivation of lipid-enveloped viruses in human plasma products (60). However, use of this method for antivenoms has not been reported.

Implementation of dedicated viral inactivation treatments, such as S/D or other methods, should be encouraged for processes which, based on risk assessment, would offer an insufficient margin of viral safety. Process changes associated with the introduction of new viral reduction steps, and the subsequent removal of any toxic compounds needed for viral inactivation, should be demonstrated not to affect the quality and stability of antivenoms, and most particularly the neutralization efficacy of venoms. Preclinical assessment of the possible impact of newly introduced viral inactivation treatments should be mandatory.

14.4.6 Possible contribution of phenol and cresols

The anti-bacterial agents, phenol or cresols, and more rarely formaldehyde, are added, by most manufacturers to the starting plasma donations as well as to the final liquid antivenom preparations, at a maximum final concentration of 0.25–0.35%. Compounds like phenol are known to be very lipid-soluble and lipophilic.

Performing validations of the potential virucidal effect of antimicrobial agents as added to the starting hyperimmune plasma and to the final antivenom preparations is encouraged. More information is needed on the potential impact of these antimicrobial agents on the viral safety of antivenoms.

14.5 Production-scale implementation of process steps contributing to viral safety

As there is increasing, although preliminary, evidence that at least some of the existing steps in the production of antivenoms contribute to viral reduction, it is already recommended that specific care should be taken to ensure their appropriate industrial implementation so as not to compromise any possible benefits they provide on viral safety.

Measures should therefore be taken to ensure that such steps are correctly carried out in a manufacturing environment and that cross-contamination and downstream-contamination are avoided. Such important aspects of product safety have been highlighted recently in WHO Guidelines (60) and should also be taken into consideration for large-scale manufacture of antivenoms. Specific attention should be given to:

- *Process design and layout*, in particular the production floor area needed to carry out such treatment safely, the justification for creating a safety zone to avoid risk of downstream contamination, and the procedures used for cleaning and sanitization of the equipment to avoid batch-to-batch cross-contamination.
- *Equipment specifications*, having in mind the potential contribution to viral reduction. For instance, vessels used for low pH incubation or caprylic acid treatment should be fully enclosed and temperature-controlled. There should be no “dead points” where the temperature defined in the specification or the homogeneity of mixing cannot be ensured. A poor equipment design could compromise the viral safety potentially afforded by a given production step.
- *Qualification and validation*: should verify that the equipment conforms to predefined technical specifications and relevant GMP.
- *Process implementation*: production steps contributing to viral safety such as low pH treatment and caprylic acid treatments could be implemented in two stages performed in two distinct enclosed tanks. Care should be taken to ensure complete process segregation before and after the completion of these treatments to avoid risks of downstream contamination.

- *Process control*: is a critical part of the manufacturing process since completion of viral inactivation and removal cannot be guaranteed by testing the final product. Samples should be taken to confirm that the process conditions of claimed inactivation steps meet the specified limits (e.g. for pH, concentration of stabilizers and concentration of virus inactivating agent, such as caprylate). When this is technically feasible and intermediates are stable, samples can be kept frozen for possible additional analysis prior to the release of the batch. It is the responsibility of the quality assurance department to ensure that the execution of steps contributing to virus inactivation and removal in a production setting conforms to the conditions that contribute to such virus reduction.
- *Standard operating procedures*: steps contributing to viral reduction should be described in approved standard operating procedures. These should contain critical process limits for the viral inactivation and removal methods.
- *Role of the quality assurance department*: because of the critical nature of the viral inactivation and removal steps, quality assurance personnel should review and approve the recorded conditions for viral inactivation and removal while the batch is being processed; i.e. not just as part of the final overall review of the batch file.

14.6 Transmissible spongiform encephalopathy

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) has not been identified in any equine species. There has been no case of transmission of TSE linked to antivenoms or other equine-derived blood products.

Of particular concern, however, is the fact that TSEs include scrapie in sheep and goats, ruminant species used, although less frequently than the horse, in the manufacture of antivenoms. Scrapie is a disease similar to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or “mad-cow” disease), but is not known to infect humans. However, the blood of sheep with experimental BSE or natural scrapie can be infectious, and scrapie has been experimentally transmitted to monkeys. Because the infectious agents of scrapie and BSE behave similarly in sheep and goats, the use of the blood of small ruminants should either be avoided in preparing biologicals or be selected very carefully from sources known to be free of TSEs. The recent findings of disease-associated proteins in muscle tissue of sheep with scrapie and the recognition of BSE itself in a goat, reinforce the need for manufacturers of biologicals, including antivenoms, to maintain the precautionary safety measures recommended in the WHO guidelines on TSE tissue infectivity (54).

According to these recommendations, the use of tissues or body fluids of ruminant origin should be avoided in the preparation of biological and pharmaceutical products. When sheep materials must be used, they should therefore be obtained from animals assessed to have negligible risk of scrapie. The feed of animals used for production of hyperimmune plasma should be free of ruminant-derived material. Documented surveillance records should be available.

The infectious TSE agents are associated with misfolded, abnormal, prion protein (PrP^{TSE}). It is not yet known whether manufacturing processes used to produce antivenoms from sheep plasma include steps that can contribute to the removal of PrP^{TSE}. Experimental prion clearance studies, based on spiking experiments, can be performed to assess the capacity of the process to remove PrP^{TSE} and infectivity. However, there is still uncertainty about the validity of such experimental studies since PrP^{TSE} has not been detected in blood and plasma and the properties of infectivity in blood are not well understood.

14.7 Main recommendations

- **The viral safety of antivenoms results from a combination of measures:**
 - to ensure satisfactory health status of the animals;
 - to reduce the risk of contamination in the starting material;
 - to ensure the contribution of the manufacturing process towards inactivation and/or removal of viruses; and
 - to ensure compliance with GMP all along the chain of production.
- **Manufacturing processes should include at least one, and, preferably, two steps contributing to robust viral reduction. A virus inactivation step that can be easily monitored is usually preferred to other means of viral reduction, such as non-specific removal.**
- **Manufacturers are encouraged to evaluate and validate the capacity of their current manufacturing processes (in particular low pH pepsin digestion, caprylic acid treatment, ammonium sulfate or heat precipitation, and possibly other steps) to inactivate or remove viruses. These studies should be done following existing international guidelines and using relevant and/or model viruses that are representative of the viruses that could affect the animals used for the production of the antivenom immunoglobulins.**
- **The removal of antimicrobial agents from the final formulation of antivenoms should be carefully weighed against the potential benefits these agents may have on the viral safety.**
- **Should the viral reduction processes used be found to be insufficient to ensure a margin of safety, the introduction of dedicated viral reduction methods should be considered. The impact of such process changes on product efficacy and safety should be carefully analysed in vitro as well as in preclinical studies before performing clinical evaluations in humans.**
- **Great attention should be paid to the production-scale implementation of all steps contributing to viral safety to ensure a consistent and reproducible batch-to-batch viral reduction and an absence of risks of cross-contamination and downstream re-contamination that would jeopardize the viral safety of the product.**
- **When sheeps are to be used for the production of plasma, the animals should be obtained from sources assessed to have negligible risk of scrapie.**

15 QUALITY CONTROL OF ANTIVENOMS

The quality control of the final product is a key element in the quality assurance of antivenoms. Quality control tests should be performed by the manufacturer or under its responsibility before the product is released. In addition, relevant analyses should be performed on any intermediate steps of the manufacturing protocol as part of the in-process quality control.

The results obtained should meet the specifications approved for each antivenom product or its intermediates, and are part of the batch record. For a liquid preparation, some quality control tests, such as the potency test or the detection of residual reagents used during fractionation, can be performed on the final bulk and may not need to be repeated on the final product if the processing after the bulk preparation has been validated and shown not to have any impact. The quality control of the final product in antivenoms includes the tests described below.

15.1 Tests

15.1.1 Appearance

The appearance of the product (e.g. colour of the liquid, appearance of the powder) should comply with the description in the marketing dossier.

15.1.2 Solubility (freeze-dried preparations)

The time from the addition of solvent to the complete dissolution of freeze-dried antivenom, under gentle mixing, should be determined. Antivenoms should be completely dissolved within 10 minutes at room temperature. The solution should not be cloudy. Shaking of the container should be avoided to prevent the formation of foam.

15.1.3 Extractable volume

The volume of product extractable from the container should be in compliance with that indicated on the label.

15.1.4 Venom-neutralizing potency test

This test determines the effectiveness of the antivenom to neutralize the overall toxic activity of the snake venom(s) against which the antivenom is designed to act. The first part of the test, to determine the lethal activity of the venom, is called the median lethal dose (LD₅₀) assay and usually uses mice of a defined weight range (e.g. 18–20 g). For new venoms whose LD₅₀ is unknown, it is recommended that a range dose-finding study, using one mouse per venom dose, is performed to avoid using excessive numbers of animals. Some producers use other test animals, such as guinea-pigs. While weights will clearly vary between animal species, the following principles, specified for mice, will still apply to these alternative test animals. It should be borne in mind that there are variations in the susceptibility of various strains of mice to the lethal effect of venoms.

LD₅₀ range-finding test: Various venom doses are prepared using saline solution as diluent, and aliquots of a precise volume (0.2–0.5 ml) of each dose are injected, using one mouse per dose, by the intravenous route, in the tail vein (or, alternatively, by the intraperitoneal route (using injection volumes of 0.5 ml)). Deaths are recorded at 24 hours (intravenous test) or at 48 hours (intraperitoneal test). On the basis of this preliminary dose-finding experiment, a range of venom doses causing 0% to 100% lethality is established and thus narrows the range of venom doses required to formally estimate the toxic activity of the venom.

The median lethal dose (LD₅₀) assay: Groups of 5–6 mice of a defined weight range are injected intravenously, in the tail vein, with a precise volume (0.2–0.5 ml) of solutions of varying doses of venom dissolved in sterile saline solution. A minimum of 5 mice is the smallest number recommended for obtaining a statistically significant result. In some laboratories the LD₅₀ is estimated by the intraperitoneal route using an injection volume of 0.5 ml. Deaths are recorded at 24 hours (for assays involving intravenous injections) or at 48 hours (when intraperitoneal injections are used), and LD₅₀ is estimated by Probit analysis (102), Spearman-Kärber (8) or alternative procedures (such as non-parametric methods). One venom LD₅₀ is defined as the minimal amount of venom causing death in 50% of the mice injected. The test to assess the neutralizing potency of an antivenom is called the median effective dose (ED₅₀) assay. For a new antivenom, it is recommended that a preliminary range dose-finding procedure is performed, using one mouse per antivenom dose.

ED₅₀ range-finding test: The selected multiple of the venom LD₅₀ (3–6 LD₅₀) is mixed with different doses of antivenom and incubated at 37°C for 30 minutes and each mixture injected into a single mouse. This preliminary test should establish a range of antivenom volumes that result in 100% survival and 100% death of the injected mice and thus narrows down the range of doses required for the formal ED₅₀ test.

The median effective dose (ED₅₀) assay: This test involves the incubation of a fixed amount of venom (“challenge dose”, usually corresponding to 3–6 LD₅₀), with various volumes of the antivenom adjusted to a constant final volume with saline solution (53, 103, 104). The mixtures are incubated for 30 minutes at 37 °C, and then aliquots of a precise volume (0.2–0.5 ml) of each mixture are injected into groups of generally 5 or 6¹ mice of a defined weight range by the intravenous route, using the tail vein. A control group injected with a mixture of the venom “challenge dose” with saline solution alone (no antivenom) should be included to confirm that the venom “challenge dose” induces 100% lethality. When the test is performed by the intraperitoneal route, a volume of 0.5 ml is administered. Centrifugation of the antivenom–venom mixtures is not recommended because residual venom toxicity may remain in the immunoprecipitates. After injection, deaths are recorded at 24 hours (intravenous test) or at 48 hours (intraperitoneal test) and the results analysed using Probit analysis (102), Spearman-Kärber (8) or alternative procedures (such as non-parametric methods). The median effective dose (ED₅₀) of an antivenom is defined as the volume of antivenom that protects 50% of the mice injected.

The ED₅₀ can be expressed in various ways:

- mg of venom neutralized by ml of antivenom;
- µl antivenom required to neutralize the “challenge dose” of venom used;
- µl of antivenom required to neutralize one mg of venom; and
- number of LD₅₀ of venom neutralized per ml of antivenom.

Every production laboratory and every national regulatory agency should establish the accepted levels of neutralizing potency for the various antivenoms being produced and distributed. In this regard, it is important to guarantee that a standardized assay is used by the manufacturing laboratories. Since the methodology to estimate antivenom potency (i.e. ED₅₀) varies between laboratories and countries, manufacturers should disclose the conditions under which the potency of their antivenoms is estimated to the corresponding regulatory agencies in the course of their licensing and control procedures.

¹ 10 mice may be needed for some venoms.

The protocols for the selection and quality control of the venoms used for these potency assays should be established in each quality control laboratory (see section 8). Venoms used in this test should correspond to a representative pool of well-identified snake specimens collected from various regions within the geographical range of distribution of the species in a country. These national reference venom pools must be evaluated periodically to ensure that they have not deteriorated (see section 8 on quality control of venoms).

Until *in vitro* or alternative tests of lesser severity become accepted, these venom LD₅₀ and antivenom ED₅₀ assays should be performed by all manufacturers before an antivenom can be used in humans. The assays should be conducted under conditions causing the minimal possible suffering to the experimental animals.

15.1.5 Osmolality

Osmolality can be measured to determine the tonicity of the antivenom solution. It is recommended that it be at least 240 mosmol/kg. Determination of osmolality is also an indirect means to determine the quantity of salts or excipients added for formulating the batch.

15.1.6 Identification

When several types of antivenoms are produced by a single laboratory, the identity of each batch of antivenom should be checked. Identity tests may include biological assays as well as physicochemical and immunological tests. Double immunodiffusion assays, confronting the antivenom with the venoms against which the antivenom is designed to act, are often used. In the case of laboratories that use various animal species to raise antivenoms, i.e. horses and sheep, an immunological identity test should be used to identify the mammalian species in which the antivenoms are produced. The potency assay against venoms is another way to identify antivenoms.

15.1.7 Protein concentration

The total protein concentration of antivenoms is performed using the Kjeldahl method for nitrogen determination. Alternatively, several colorimetric procedures can be used, as well as measuring absorbance at 280 nm. The presence of preservatives should be taken into account since they may interfere with some protein determination methods (105).

The total concentration of proteins in antivenoms should preferably not exceed 10 g/dl, unless a higher protein content is justified and authorized by the competent authority.

15.1.8 Purity

The purity of the active substance, i.e. intact immunoglobulin or immunoglobulin fragments, should be assessed. They should constitute the great majority of the preparation, ideally greater than 90%.

Electrophoretic methods in polyacrylamide gels (SDS-PAGE run under reducing or non-reducing conditions) are suitable for this purpose, since these techniques allow the detection and monitoring of IgG, F(ab')₂, Fab, non-immunoglobulin plasma protein contaminants (in particular albumin), and degradation products. The electrophoretic pattern should be compared to that of a reference preparation. A semi-quantification can be performed by calibration of the procedure. Of particular relevance is the assessment of the albumin content which ideally should not exceed 1% of total protein content. The following approach can serve as a guide in assessing the purity of antivenoms:

- *SDS–PAGE under non-reducing conditions.* This analysis provides qualitative (or, at best, semiquantitative) information on the amounts of intact immunoglobulins, digestion products and, importantly, on the presence of high-molecular-mass oligomers (soluble aggregates) and low-molecular-mass contaminants (which are expected in the case of enzymatically-digested antivenoms).
- *SDS–PAGE under reducing conditions.* Analysis under these conditions can provide information on the amount of immunoglobulins and their fragments by direct visualization of intact and/or digested immunoglobulin heavy chains.

15.1.9 Molecular-size distribution

The presence of aggregates and other components in antivenoms can be assessed by size-exclusion liquid chromatography (gel filtration) in HPLC systems.

Densitometric analyses of chromatographic profiles allow the quantification of protein aggregates and of the relative abundances of: intact immunoglobulins, divalent immunoglobulin fragments (F(ab')₂), monovalent immunoglobulin fragments (Fab) and dimers, as well as low-molecular-mass enzymatic digestion products.

In intact immunoglobulin-based antivenoms this method allows quantitation of albumin as its molecular mass (~ 66 kDa) can be resolved from the ~ 160 kDa peak of intact immunoglobulins.

15.1.10 Test for pyrogens

Antivenoms should comply with the rabbit pyrogen test where required by the local regulations. This test is based on intravenous injection of antivenoms in the ear vein of rabbits (usually 1.0 ml per kg body mass), followed by the measurement of rectal temperature at various time intervals after injection. The detailed procedures are described in various pharmacopoeias.

Bacterial lipopolysaccharides can also be detected by the *Limulus* amoebocyte lysate (LAL) test. The test should be validated for each type of antivenom, since there have been reports of false-positive and false-negative reactions when testing antivenoms and other plasma-derived products. The sensitivity of this LAL test should be correlated with the rabbit pyrogen test, and the endotoxin limits established. When regulation allows, a validated LAL test is used in place of the rabbit pyrogen test.

15.1.11 Test for abnormal toxicity test

The abnormal toxicity test may be performed at the stage of product development but is increasingly being abandoned in most regulations as it provides limited information for routine quality assessment of a product. Correct implementation of GMP should provide evidence that the product would comply with the test for abnormal toxicity.

15.1.12 Test for sterility

Antivenoms should be free of bacteria and fungi, i.e. they should be sterile. The sterility test is performed following methodologies specified in various pharmacopoeias such as the *European pharmacopoeia*.

Since antivenoms may contain preservatives in their formulation, it is necessary to “neutralize” the preservatives before the samples are added to culture media. This is usually performed by filtering a volume of antivenom through a 0.45-µm pore membrane, and then filtering through the same membrane a solution that neutralizes the bacteriostatic and fungistatic effects of the preservatives used in antivenom. The membrane is then aseptically removed and cut into two halves. One half is added to trypticase soy broth and the other is added to thioglycolate medium.

Control culture flasks are included for each medium. Flasks are incubated at 20–25 °C (trypticase soy broth) or at 30–35 °C (thioglycolate) for 14 days. Culture flasks are examined daily for bacterial or fungal growth. The number of vials tested per batch should be in compliance with local regulations.

15.1.13 Concentration of sodium chloride and other excipients

The concentration of the various excipients or stabilizers added for formulation should be determined using appropriate chemical methods.

15.1.14 Determination of pH

The pH of antivenom should be determined using a potentiometer.

15.1.15 Concentration of preservatives

When used in the formulation of antivenoms, the concentration of preservatives (phenol or cresols) should be quantified. The acceptable range of preservative concentration in antivenoms should be established and validated in each quality control laboratory. Phenol concentration should not exceed 2.5 g/l and cresols 3.5 g/l.

Phenol concentration can be determined spectrophotometrically on the basis of the reactivity of phenol with 4-aminoantipyrine, under alkaline conditions (pH 9.0-9.2) in the presence of potassium ferrocyanide as oxidant. Other methods are also available. Cresols can be determined by HPLC methods.

15.1.16 Chemical agents used in plasma fractionation

The chemical reagents used in the precipitation and purification of antivenoms, such as ammonium sulfate, caprylic acid and others, should be removed from the final product during diafiltration or dialysis. Limits should be established and their residual amount quantified in the final product. Likewise, the elimination of pepsin or papain from the final preparations should be guaranteed, especially for preparations that are maintained in liquid form, to avoid proteolytic activity that may damage the antivenoms.

The determination of the residual amount of agents used in plasma fractionation could be excluded from routine release testing if the process of manufacturing has been validated to eliminate these reagents. The detection of residual reagents can also be performed on the final bulk rather than in the final product.

15.1.17 Residual moisture (freeze-dried preparations)

Residual moisture content can be determined by several methodologies, such as:

- a gravimetric method assessing the loss of weight on heating;
- the Karl-Fischer titration, based on the principle that iodine, together with pyridine, sulfur dioxide and methanol from the reagent react quantitatively with water; and
- thermogravimetric methods.

The methodology most commonly recommended is the Karl-Fischer titration. Every manufacturing and quality control laboratory must establish the accepted maximum residual moisture for their antivenom ensuring the stability of the product over its claimed shelf-life. A residual moisture content of less than 3% is usually recommended for most freeze-dried therapeutic biological products.

15.2 Antivenom reference preparations

The use of in-house reference preparations of antivenoms, instead of international standards, is recommended, since the potency and specificity can only be compared with antivenoms of similar specificity and neutralizing profile. An in-house reference preparation should be obtained from a suitable batch of the product that has been fully evaluated by the quality control laboratory..

15.3 Main recommendations

- **Quality control of antivenom preparations, both for product intermediates and final product, as part of the batch release, should be performed by the manufacturers. National regulatory agencies will review the tests performed by the manufacturer and select which tests to develop, when required, on a case-by-case basis.**
- **Quality control tests to be performed by manufacturers as part of the batch release include: neutralization potency test against the most relevant venoms, identification, protein concentration, purity of the active substance, content of protein aggregates and non-IgG contaminants, pyrogen test, sterility test, concentration of excipients, osmolality, pH, concentration of preservatives, determination of traces of agents used in plasma fractionation, visual inspection, and, for freeze-dried preparations, residual moisture and solubility.**
- **Antivenom reference preparations reflecting specific characteristics of antivenoms produced should be prepared by each manufacturer to be used as standards in their laboratory settings, in particular to measure neutralization capacity of their specific antivenom products against targeted venoms. When possible, a national reference antivenom should be established.**

16 STABILITY, STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION OF ANTIVENOMS

16.1 Stability

Stability studies should be performed to determine the stability of antivenoms. These studies should be done when a new product, a process change, or a new formulation is developed. They are essential to define the shelf-life of the product and are intended to prove that the antivenom remains stable and efficacious until the expiry date.

It has long been considered, somewhat empirically, that liquid preparations have a shelf-life of up to 3 years at 2-8 °C, and freeze-dried preparations up to 5 years, when kept in the dark at room temperature. Nevertheless, the actual stability of each antivenom formulation should be appropriately determined by each manufacturer. It is highly recommended that manufacturers perform stability studies to evaluate the possibility that their preparations could be stored for a long period under non-refrigeration (for instance at 30 °C).

Real-time stability tests should be performed under the expected storage conditions of the antivenom. In addition, these tests could be performed under worst-case storage conditions. Quality control parameters are determined at regular pre-established time intervals. Essential parameters include venom neutralization potency, turbidity and content of aggregates, among others, since these are especially prone to alter upon storage.

Accelerated stability studies may be performed to provide early useful information on the product stability profile, but are not a substitute for real-time data. The antivenom is exposed to

harsher conditions than usual, such as a higher temperature, and the stability is assessed over a shorter timespan.

16.2 Storage

Antivenoms should be stored at a temperature within the range that assures stability, as found by stability tests. This is particularly critical for liquid formulations, which usually require storage at between 2 and 8 °C. Therefore, deviations from this temperature range, due to interruptions in the cold chain during transportation or storage, are likely to result in product deterioration. The design of adequate cold chain programmes, as part of the public health systems in every country, is critical, and national protocols should be developed. The distribution policies for national vaccination programmes can be adopted for the transportation and storage of antivenoms. The stability of liquid preparations at temperatures higher than 2-8 °C should be evaluated and, if needed, new formulations allowing such storage conditions should be developed.

16.3 Distribution

Adequate distribution of antivenoms is a matter of great concern in many regions of the world. Since most of the antivenoms available are liquid preparations, the maintenance of an adequate cold chain must be guaranteed, despite the difficulties to be encountered in rural areas of some developing countries. National and regional health authorities should develop distribution strategies to ensure that antivenoms are allocated to the areas where they are needed or use the distribution channels in place for other national primary health care programmes. Both the specificity of the antivenom and the number of vials or ampoules to be distributed should be taken into consideration. This is particularly relevant in countries that use monospecific antivenoms, since distribution of these products should be guided by the known distribution of the species. To ensure an appropriate supply for clinical use, inventories should be in excess of the estimated number of cases, to allow for unpredictable surges in local demand, accepting that some antivenoms will not have been used by the time of their expiry date.

16.4 Main recommendations

- **The quality control of each antivenom batch prepared by a manufacturer should include the potency test for neutralization of lethality (ED₅₀).**
- **In general, liquid preparations require a cold chain, whereas freeze-dried preparations do not. However, storage conditions are product- or formulation-specific and may vary. Manufacturers should determine the stability of each antivenom pharmaceutical preparation by conducting real-time stability studies.**
- **Manufacturers should study the stability of antivenoms at the ambient temperatures in the areas where the product will be used.**
- **The distribution of antivenoms by health authorities should rely on a proper assessment of the epidemiology of snakebite envenomings, and on the knowledge of the geographical distribution of the most relevant venomous species. This is particularly important for monospecific antivenoms.**
- **National regulatory authorities should ask manufacturers to provide information obtained from the preclinical assessment of all antivenom used in their territories against the venoms found in the region or country where the product is intended to be used.**

17 PRECLINICAL ASSESSMENT OF ANTIVENOMS

17.1 Introduction

A fundamental and ethical requirement of all new therapeutic agents intended for human use is that their safety and efficacy should be established, initially by preclinical *in vitro* and *in vivo* laboratory tests and, if the results of these prove satisfactory, by clinical trials in human patients. Information supporting the physicochemical characterization of the new antivenom, such as protein content and level of purity of the preparation should be available before clinical studies are initiated. The assays to be performed are described under section 15, on quality control of antivenoms.

Preclinical testing of antivenoms should be done when:

- a new antivenom is being developed;
- an existing antivenom is to be introduced for use in a new geographical region or country.

In both cases, preclinical studies in animal models should be a regulatory requirement enforced by the medicines regulatory authorities as part of the licensing procedures for antivenoms.

The preclinical tests of new or existing antivenoms necessitate the use of experimental rodents. Despite reservations over the physiological relevance of these animal models to human envenoming and the severity of these *in vivo* assays (sections 17.4 and 17.5), the tests for determining venom lethality (LD₅₀) and antivenom neutralizing capacity (ED₅₀) are currently the only validated means of assessing venom toxicity and antivenom neutralizing potency by both manufacturers and regulatory authorities worldwide.

It is important to make a distinction between “essential” and “recommended” preclinical assays. The “essential” preclinical assays consist of the overall evaluation of toxic activity of the specific snake venoms (LD₅₀) and the corresponding antivenom neutralizing efficacy of the overall venom(s) toxicity (ED₅₀). These tests are required:

- for the routine quality control of antivenom potency;
- to test the ability of a new antivenom to neutralize the venoms from snakes from the country or region where it is going to be introduced;
- to show neutralizing efficacy of an existing antivenom against medically relevant species in a new geographical region or country.

In summary, before any antivenom is used therapeutically in humans in a given region or country, it should have been preclinically assessed using the “essential” assays against the relevant snake venoms.

Preclinical testing of antivenoms also includes a number of assays whose selection depends on the main pathophysiological effects induced by the venom to be tested. Additional tests are therefore strongly recommended for new antivenoms and for new applications of existing antivenoms to determine whether they are effective in eliminating the most clinically-relevant pathophysiological effects induced by the specific venom(s) of interest.

As an example, a new antivenom developed against *Echis ocellatus* envenoming should be tested for its preclinical neutralizing potency (LD₅₀ and ED₅₀ tests):

- before it is released for the first time for human trials; and
- for the routine quality control of the potency of subsequent batches.

It is also recommended that the first batch be preclinically tested for its ability to eliminate venom-induced coagulopathy and haemorrhage – the most medically important effects of envenoming by *E. ocellatus*.

17.2 Essential assay for preclinical testing of antivenoms: prevention of lethality

The methodology for estimating the median lethal dose (LD₅₀) of venoms and the median effective dose (ED₅₀) of antivenoms is described in detail in the section on quality control of antivenoms (section 15). The same methods used in the routine quality control of antivenoms should be used in the preclinical testing of all new antivenoms and all new applications of existing antivenoms.

17.3 Additional recommended assays for preclinical testing of antivenoms

It is necessary to test whether antivenoms are effective in the neutralization of the most relevant pathophysiological effects induced by a particular venom. These “recommended” preclinical tests are, however, not intended for the routine quality control of antivenom batches. The relevant methods to be used are listed below.

17.3.1 Neutralization of venom haemorrhagic activity

Many venoms, especially those of vipers, exert powerful local and systemic haemorrhagic activity which is due primarily to venom zinc metalloproteinases. These enzymes damage the basement membrane that surrounds the endothelial cells of capillary blood vessels resulting in bleeding into the tissues. Bleeding into the brain and other major organs is considered to be the major lethal effect of envenoming by many viperid species (106). The minimum haemorrhagic dose of a venom (MHD) is defined as the amount of venom (in µg dry weight) which, when injected intradermally, induces in mice a 10-mm haemorrhagic lesion 24 hours after injection (107, 108).

The MHD test is carried out by preparing aliquots of 50 µl of physiological saline solution containing a range of venom doses. Mice (18–20 g body weight; 5 mice per group) are placed under light general anaesthesia (e.g. halothane/oxygen) and the hair surrounding the injection site is shaved. The venom solutions (50 µl) are injected intradermally in the shaved skin. After 24 hours, mice are killed using an approved humane procedure, the area of the injected skin is removed, and the haemorrhagic lesion in the inner side of the skin is measured using calipers in two directions with background illumination. Care should be taken not to stretch the skin. The mean diameter of the haemorrhagic lesion is calculated for each venom dose and the MHD estimated by plotting mean lesion diameter against venom dose and reading off the dose corresponding to a 10-mm diameter (107, 108).

To estimate the ability of an antivenom to neutralize venom-induced haemorrhage, a “challenge dose” of venom is selected, which corresponds to one or more MHDs. Between one and five MHDs have been used as the challenge dose by different laboratories. The test is carried out as above, using 5 mice per group. Mixtures of a fixed amount of venom and various dilutions of antivenom are prepared so that the challenge dose of venom is contained in 50 µl. Controls must include venom solutions incubated with physiological saline solution alone. Mixtures are incubated at 37 °C for 30 min, and aliquots of 50 µl are injected intradermally in lightly anaesthetized mice. The diameter of haemorrhagic lesions is quantified as described above, and the neutralizing ability of antivenom, expressed as MHD-median effective dose (ED₅₀), is estimated as the volume of antivenom, in microlitres, which reduces the diameter of haemorrhagic lesions by 50% when compared with the diameter of the lesion in animals injected with the control venom/saline mixture (108).

17.3.2 Neutralization of venom necrotizing activity

Venom-induced local dermonecrosis is a major problem in human victims of snakebite and it has long been considered important to have an assay system to evaluate the effect of an antivenom on this pathology. However, it should be noted that the value of antivenoms in overcoming the cytolytic effects of venoms has not yet been established; indeed, there is considerable doubt whether antivenom is useful in obviating such effects in human victims of snakebite. This is because venom-induced dermonecrosis occurs quickly after a bite and there is usually a considerable delay between the envenoming of a victim and his or her arrival in hospital for treatment. Consequently, antivenom therapy can have little or no effect in reversing the damage (109, 110). Animal experiments in which the antivenom was administered to the animal at different times after the venom support this opinion (110, 111).

The minimum necrotizing dose (MND) of a venom is defined as the least amount of venom (in μg dry weight) which, when injected intradermally into groups of five lightly anaesthetized mice (18–20 g body weight), results in a necrotic lesion of 5 mm diameter 3 days later. The method used is the same as that for the MHD, except that the skin is examined 3 days after the intradermal injection of the venom (107).

To estimate the ability of an antivenom to neutralize venom-induced dermonecrosis, a challenge dose of venom is selected, usually between one and two MNDs. The test is carried out as above, using 5 mice per group. Mixtures of a fixed concentration of venom and various dilutions of antivenom are prepared so that the venom challenge dose is contained in 50 μl . Controls include venom solutions incubated with physiological saline solution alone. Mixtures are incubated at 37 °C for 30 min, and aliquots of 50 μl are injected intradermally in lightly anaesthetized mice (112, 113). The diameter of dermonecrotic lesions is quantified 3 days after injection, as described above, and the neutralizing ability of antivenom, expressed as MND-median effective dose (ED_{50}), is estimated as the volume of antivenom, in microlitres, which reduces the diameter of necrotic lesions by 50% when compared with the diameter of the lesion in mice injected with the control venom/saline mixture.

17.3.3 Neutralization of venom procoagulant effect

Many venoms, especially from some vipers, cause consumption of coagulation factors which results in incoagulable blood. This, combined with the haemorrhagic nature of some of these venoms, can result in a very poor prognosis for a severely envenomed patient. Simple *in vitro* methods exist to measure this venom-induced pathophysiological effect and the ability of an antivenom to eliminate it.

The minimum coagulant dose (MCD) of a venom is defined as the least amount of venom (in mg dry weight per litre of test solution or $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$) that clots either a solution of bovine fibrinogen (2 g/l) in 60 sec at 37 °C (MCD-F) and/or a standard citrated solution of human plasma (fibrinogen content 2.8 g/l) under the same conditions (MCD-P).

For measurement of the MCD-F, 50 μl of physiological saline with final venom concentrations ranging from 240 to 0.5 mg/l is added to 0.2 ml of bovine fibrinogen solution at 37 °C in new glass clotting tubes. The solutions are mixed thoroughly and the clotting time recorded. The MCD-P is estimated by adding the same venom concentrations to 0.2 ml of the standard human plasma solution under identical conditions and recording the clotting time. In each case, the MCD is calculated by plotting clotting time against venom concentration and reading off the level at the 60-second clotting time (107).

To estimate the ability of an antivenom to neutralize venom procoagulant activity, a challenge dose of venom is selected, which corresponds to one MCD-P or one MCD-F. Mixtures of a fixed

concentration of venom and various dilutions of antivenom are prepared so that the challenge dose of venom is contained in 50 µl. Controls include venom solutions incubated with physiological saline solution alone. Mixtures are incubated at 37 °C for 30 min, and aliquots of 50 µl are added to 0.2 ml of plasma or fibrinogen solution, as described. The formation or absence of clots is observed during a maximum of 30 min. The minimum volume of antivenom which completely prevents clotting is estimated and corresponds to the MCD-effective dose.

17.3.4 Neutralization of in vivo venom defibrinogenating activity

This test is a direct measure of the in vivo defibrinogenating effect of certain venoms. To measure the minimum venom defibrinogenating dose (MDD), a wide range of venom doses is selected and each dose, in a volume of 0.2 ml, is injected intravenously into 4 mice (18–20 g body weight). One hour after injection, the mice are placed under terminal general anaesthesia and bled by cardiac puncture. The blood from each animal is placed in a new glass clotting tube, left at room temperature for 1 hour and the presence/absence of a clot recorded. The MDD is defined as the minimum dose of venom that produces incoagulable blood in all mice tested within 1 hour of intravenous injection.

Antivenom neutralization of the venom component(s) responsible for in vivo defibrinogenation is estimated by incubating a challenge dose of venom, corresponding to one MDD, with different amounts of the antivenom. Controls should include venom solutions incubated with saline solution instead of antivenom. Mixtures are incubated at 37 °C for 30 min before injection of 0.2 ml by the intravenous route in groups of 4 mice (18–20 g body weight). After 1 hour, mice are bled as described above, the blood is placed in new glass clotting tubes and left undisturbed for 1 hour at room temperature, after which the presence or absence of a clot is recorded. Neutralizing ability of antivenoms is expressed as MDD-effective dose, corresponding to the minimum volume of antivenom in which the blood samples of all injected mice showed clot formation (113, 114).

17.3.5 Neutralization of venom myotoxic activity

The presence of myotoxic components in a venom results in the degeneration of skeletal muscle by breaking down muscle fibres. Damage is characterized by the disruption of plasma membranes, local infiltration of inflammatory cells and oedema. Myotoxicity is characterized by the appearance of myoglobin in urine and by increments in the serum levels of muscle-derived enzymes, such as creatine kinase (CK). Myotoxic phospholipase A₂ (PLA₂) enzymes are found in a wide range of snake venoms. Some of these PLA₂s may be primarily myotoxic, or neurotoxic, or both. In addition, myotoxicity may occur as a consequence of ischaemia induced in muscle fibres by the effect of haemorrhagic venom components in the microvasculature (115).

Venom myotoxic activity is determined by injecting rats or mice with various doses of venom in a constant volume of 50 µl (using saline solution as diluent) into the right gastrocnemius muscle. In the case of mice, groups of 5 animals of 18–20 g body weight are used per dose. Control animals are injected with the same volume of saline solution. Tail-snip blood samples are collected at a specific time interval (3 hr in mice), and the CK activity of serum or plasma is determined using commercially-available diagnostic kits (116, 117). Myotoxic activity is expressed as the minimum myotoxic dose (MMD), defined as the amount of venom that induces an increment in serum or plasma CK activity corresponding to four times the activity in serum or plasma of animals injected with saline solution alone. Myotoxicity can also be assessed by histological evaluation of muscle damage after venom injection, although this is a more expensive and more time consuming method than the CK determination.

To estimate the ability of an antivenom to neutralize venom myotoxicity, a challenge dose of venom is selected, which corresponds to 3 MMDs. The test is carried out as above, using 5 mice per group. Mixtures of a fixed concentration of venom and various dilutions of antivenom are prepared so that the challenge dose of venom is contained in 50 µl. Controls include venom solutions incubated with physiological saline solution alone. Mixtures are incubated at 37 °C for 30 min, and aliquots of 50 µl are injected into the gastrocnemius muscle, as described above. Blood samples are collected 3 hours after injection (in the case of mice) and serum or plasma CK activity is quantified. The neutralizing ability of antivenom, expressed as MMD-median effective dose (ED₅₀) is estimated as the volume of antivenom, in microlitres, which reduces the serum or plasma CK activity by 50% when compared to the activity of animals injected with venom incubated with saline solution only (104).

17.3.6 Neutralization of venom neurotoxic activity

Several laboratory methods for assessing venom-induced neurotoxicity have been developed (e.g. chick biventer cervicis nerve-muscle preparation (118, 119); mouse hemidiaphragm phrenic nerve preparation (120–124), but they are difficult to perform, require costly equipment and expert technological help and are unlikely to be practicable for most antivenom producers. Mouse lethality tests are usually reliable in predicting the neutralization of neurotoxic effects of venoms.

17.4 Development of alternative assays to replace murine lethality testing

In vivo murine assays cause considerable suffering and there have been calls for the development of alternative assays to replace the standard LD₅₀ and ED₅₀ tests. The controversy relates to the balance between the clinical benefit to humans of preclinical testing against the cost to the experimental rodents (death, pain and distress). This issue is of considerable concern and in vivo tests should be conducted with the minimal number of animals necessary and using protocols designed to minimize pain and suffering. There are alternative tests (124), which reduce the need for experimental animals, use alternative non-sentient systems or use in vitro test systems. Unfortunately, such systems cannot currently replace the rodent toxicity tests. Consequently, the development of alternative methods to animal testing in the preclinical evaluation of antivenoms, should be encouraged and when live animals are absolutely necessary, anaesthesia or analgesia should be considered and evaluated to ensure that the humane benefits of anaesthesia or analgesia to the experimental animals do not invalidate the objectives of the assay by altering relevant physiological processes (53). The establishment of humane end-points to reduce suffering and limiting the duration of the assays to reduce the period of animal suffering is also encouraged, but would also need to be carefully evaluated to ensure the validity of the results.

17.5 Limitations of preclinical assays

It is acknowledged that the in vivo and in vitro essential and recommended preclinical tests have physiological limitations (the venom and venom/antivenom injection protocols do not represent the natural situation, and the physiological responses of rodents to envenoming and treatment may differ from those of humans). Such limitations make the rodent model of human envenoming and treatment less than ideal. Care should therefore be taken to avoid simplistic extrapolations from this assay to the clinical situation. Nevertheless, the LD₅₀ and ED₅₀ tests represent the methods most widely used for assessment of antivenom potency, and a number of clinical trials have demonstrated that the ED₅₀ test is useful (124, 125), but not infallible (126, 127), at predicting the efficacy of antivenoms in the clinical setting. An additional value of these

tests is the assurance that antivenoms are manufactured with an accepted, quantifiable and uniform neutralizing potency.

17.6 Main recommendations

- **Preclinical testing of antivenoms both to determine the purification profile of the preparation and its venom(s) neutralization capacity in animal models should be a minimum regulatory requirement to be enforced by the medicines regulatory agencies.**
- **The estimation of the ability of an antivenom to neutralize the lethal activity of venom(s) (LD₅₀ and ED₅₀) is the most relevant preclinical assessment and should be performed for all antivenoms.**
- **All new antivenoms, as well as existing antivenoms to be used in new geographical areas, should furthermore be assessed for their ability to eliminate specific pathologies caused by the venoms of the snakes for which the antivenom has been designed. The selection of which preclinical recommended test(s) to perform will depend on the predominant pathophysiological effects induced by the specific snake venom and be appropriately adapted for each antivenom. The recommended tests are not required for quality control assessment of subsequent batches of antivenom.**
- **Preclinical testing still relies heavily on the use of laboratory rodents and involves an unsatisfactorily high degree of suffering. The working protocols should recommend anaesthesia and analgesia to reduce suffering, where possible. Animals should be housed, fed and handled according to approved veterinary standards.**
- **Research should be promoted for the development of both refinements of the in vivo assay protocols to reduce pain and suffering of animals, and of in vitro alternatives to the in vivo assays to reduce the number of animals used in preclinical testing. The results of any modified in vivo, or new in vitro protocols, should be rigorously compared with results from existing protocols to ensure the statistical validity of the newly developed methods.**

18 CLINICAL ASSESSMENT OF ANTIVENOMS

18.1 Introduction

Antivenoms are unusual among pharmaceutical agents in that they have been used in human patients for more than 100 years with little attention paid to clinical trials of their efficacy and safety. However, since the 1970s it has been clearly demonstrated that it is possible to carry out dose-finding and randomized controlled trials in human victims of snakebite envenomings. These studies have yielded very valuable information as in the case of clinical trials of other therapeutic agents which are generally regarded as the essential basis for regulatory approval.

The standard pathway for clinical evaluation of new therapeutic products is:

- Phase I: healthy volunteer studies – detection of unanticipated adverse events
- Phase II: limited efficacy and safety studies, often dose-finding
- Phase III: full-scale clinical evaluation, often randomized controlled trials
- Phase IV: postmarketing surveillance

The appropriateness of this pathway for antivenoms depends upon a number of factors, including whether an antivenom is new or has been previously used in human patients and the practicality of undertaking such studies as well as national regulatory considerations.

The conduct of clinical studies is guided by the principles set down in the international regulations governing good clinical practice (128–130). These principles emphasize the responsibilities of the researcher and of the organization sponsoring the research, act to protect participants in research and ensure that the conduct of the trial is likely to lead to reliable results. Clinical trials should be registered with an appropriate registration body, prior to commencement.

18.1.1 Phase I studies

Conventional clinical studies using healthy volunteers are not appropriate in the case of antivenoms¹ because of the risk of anaphylactic and other reactions (e.g. pyrogenic or serum sickness and, rarely, hypersensitivity reactions) to volunteers. Phase I studies are primarily designed to detect unanticipated adverse events and there is extensive experience with antivenom treatment that allows a basic understanding of its pharmacokinetics.

18.1.2 Phase II and III studies

Phase II studies are usually conducted to optimize doses, establish safety of a product and give an indication of efficacy. Phase III studies are normally used to establish efficacy of a product, often in comparison with an existing product, or occasionally a placebo. Since antivenoms are so well established in the treatment of snake bite envenoming, the use of placebo controls is ethically acceptable only where there is genuine uncertainty about whether the benefit (degree of clinical improvement) from the antivenom outweighs the risk (potential rate of adverse events).

18.1.3 Phase IV studies

Phase IV studies are clinical surveillance studies that occur after market authorization of the product. In view of the difficulty in performing standard clinical trials of antivenom in some settings, this may be the only way to study safety and efficacy of an antivenom in a large number of patients.

18.2 Clinical studies of antivenoms

Although preclinical testing may be valuable in ensuring that antivenoms neutralize the venoms of interest, the complex effects of venoms in humans and the need to consider venom pharmacokinetics mean that, ultimately, the efficacy and safety of antivenoms for the treatment of human envenoming can only be determined by well designed clinical studies. Clinical studies of antivenoms primarily address three main issues:

- assessment of the optimal initial dose of antivenom;
- assessment of efficacy of the antivenom; and
- assessment of the safety of an antivenom, particularly the incidence and severity of early and late reactions.

Reaction rates for similar doses of a given batch of antivenom are unlikely to vary in different geographical locations. However, following initial preclinical testing, both efficacy and dose-finding studies may need to be repeated for a new geographical location, depending upon the

¹ Immunoglobulins derived from animal plasma.

similarity of the snake species in the new place with those where the antivenom was initially tested. If the species are similar, preclinical testing indicates good neutralization, and evidence of clinical efficacy exists in other places, postmarketing surveillance studies may be adequate.

18.2.1 Dose-finding studies

Dose-finding studies seek to establish the optimum initial dose of an antivenom required to control envenoming. The therapeutic dose of an antivenom administered by intravenous route depends on:

- the quantity of venom injected;
- the neutralizing potency of the antivenom; and
- the dose regimen.

The dose is calculated to neutralize a certain amount of venom and does not vary between adults and children. Preclinical testing may be used to estimate starting doses and these dose regimens may be evaluated in a number of ways using standard efficacy and safety end-points. Dose regimens can be assessed using prospective observational studies (79).

In these, the proportion of patients with good clinical outcomes (for example, restoration of blood coagulability) can be observed with different or escalating doses of antivenom.

As part of the design of the study, it is important to determine the minimum number of patients required to establish meaningful results by using sample size calculations (131). Results may sometimes be compared to those of previous studies (historical controls) to determine how the efficacy or safety of a newly introduced antivenom compares with previously used antivenoms (132). Subsequently, the minimum dose that appears to be effective can be evaluated in larger phase II trials or compared to another antivenom or a different dose in phase III randomized controlled trials.

18.2.2 Randomized controlled trials

Definitive phase III randomized controlled trials may require large numbers of patients because of considerable individual variation in the clinical manifestation of envenoming. The new antivenom is compared with the existing standard antivenom treatment or, if none exists, two different doses of the test antivenom may be compared. Placebo controls are rarely justified unless there is genuine uncertainty about the risk and benefits of antivenom treatment. In this situation, as a safeguard against unnecessary morbidity in either treatment group, a restricted sequential plan might be incorporated (133) which allows evaluation of results as the trial progresses, as in the early trials of therapeutic tetanus antitoxin (134).

To avoid bias, patients should be randomly allocated to the groups and the study should be blinded, at a minimum to those research personnel who are assessing the clinical response and ideally to both investigators and participants. There should be a calculation of the number of patients required in each trial arm to give the study sufficient statistical power. These power calculations are based on the expected difference in outcome between the treatment groups (if designed to demonstrate superiority of one treatment over another) or predefined limits of the acceptable performance compared to an existing product (if designed to demonstrate that the new antivenom is not worse than existing products (non-inferiority)).

18.2.3 Efficacy end-points for antivenom trials

The assessment criteria (end-points) used for antivenom studies should be predefined and objective. They may be clinical or assessed by laboratory investigations. Common end-points include mortality, time taken to restore blood coagulability (assessed by the 20-minute whole blood clotting test) (135), other laboratory parameters such as the prothrombin time, halting of bleeding or clinical improvement in neurotoxicity. Surrogate markers such as platelet count are less suitable as they may be affected by complement activation resulting from antivenom treatment itself. Patients should be observed carefully for long enough to reveal evidence of recurrent envenoming (seen particularly with short half-life Fab antivenoms) (136).

18.2.4 Safety end-points for antivenom trials

Because antivenoms consist of foreign proteins, adverse effects are an inevitable risk in therapy. Appropriate manufacturing steps can reduce the rate of adverse reactions. Rates of reaction are correlated with the purity of the antivenom product and the amount of protein infused. Continuous clinical observation at the bedside is necessary for several hours after treatment to detect acute reactions; late adverse reactions may occur several weeks later. Accurate reaction rates can only be assessed prospectively. Reaction rates may differ considerably between different antivenoms, but only a small proportion are life-threatening. Studies should aim to detect both early adverse events occurring at the time of, or within 24 hours of, antivenom administration (such as urticaria itching, fever, hypotension or bronchospasm) and late reactions such as serum sickness occurring between 5 and 24 days of antivenom administration (e.g. fever, urticaria, arthralgia, lymphadenopathy, proteinuria, or neuropathy).

18.2.5 Challenges in clinical testing of antivenoms

Several particular features of snakebite make clinical testing of antivenoms challenging. These features include the large variation in the consequences of envenoming between individuals making it necessary to study large number of patients, difficulties in identification of the species responsible for envenoming and the inaccessibility of areas where snakebite is sufficiently common to provide sufficient numbers of patients to study. Clinical studies may also be expensive, particularly if they need to be multicentre with the attendant additional complexity and logistics. However, despite these difficulties, a number of randomized controlled trials have been undertaken and published since 1974 (65, 78, 135, 137–142).

18.3 Post-marketing surveillance

Phase IV studies may be of much greater importance for antivenoms than is the case for other products. A period of active post-licensing surveillance should follow:

- the introduction of a new antivenom (often a regulatory requirement);
- the introduction of an established antivenom into a new geographical area.

Although phase IV studies traditionally focus on safety, it is critical that postmarketing studies of antivenoms examine efficacy as well as the frequency of immediate or delayed side-effects. The combination of preclinical testing and postmarketing surveillance studies is a minimum acceptable clinical evaluation when an existing antivenom is used in a new region.

18.3.1 Possible approaches

Passive surveillance is currently practised by some antivenom manufacturers. However, approaches that rely upon voluntary return of questionnaires about safety and efficacy are unlikely to provide the high quality data that are necessary. There are two potential approaches to obtaining such data.

18.3.1.1 National or regional system for post-marketing surveillance

Countries using antivenoms should establish a national or regional system for the postmarketing surveillance of antivenoms. Clinicians and health workers (such as those working in poison centres) should be encouraged to report actively to national control authorities and manufacturers any unexpected lack of clinical efficacy and adverse reactions. These should include both early adverse events, occurring at the time of, or within 24 hours of, antivenom administration, and, late reactions between 5 and 24 days. The mechanism for reporting (such as the use of standardized forms), the receiving body (e.g. the national control authority), the deadline for reporting, and the type of adverse events reportable need to be clearly defined by the authority and will depend on its structure and resources. The manufacturer of the antivenom and the authorities should assess these reports and, in consultation with one another and with specialists in the field, attempt to evaluate their significance. This assessment may require the testing of products already released and the inspection of production and control facilities and local distribution channels. If an imported product is associated with adverse reactions, the manufacturer and the national control authorities both in the country of distribution and from the country of origin should be notified.

18.3.1.2 Observational studies

In certain situations, for example, the first use of an established antivenom in a new geographical area or when routine surveillance has identified safety or efficacy concerns, there is a rationale for setting up observational studies to ensure adequate efficacy and safety. In the case of first use of an established antivenom in a new geographical area, such studies should follow preclinical testing that ensures neutralization of locally important venoms. Observational studies should carefully document the clinical responses to antivenom, the clinical outcomes and the frequency of reactions in a cohort of patients (143).

18.3.1.3 Sentinel sites

In some settings, where postmarketing surveillance of the whole of a country may be problematic, the use of sentinel sites may allow focusing of limited resources to maximize surveillance effectiveness.

18.3.2 Responses to results of post-marketing studies

High quality postmarketing studies will allow clinicians, public health officials and manufacturers to identify antivenoms with poor effectiveness, instances of incorrect use and dosage of antivenoms and serious safety issues arising from the use of antivenoms. In some situations, these issues may be addressed by improving training of staff in the management of snakebite, but these studies may also allow identification of the use of an inappropriate antivenom (144).

18.4 Main recommendations

- **Preclinical and clinical testing of antivenoms has been largely neglected in the past. Despite challenges, clinical trials of antivenoms in human patients have proved feasible and useful. As far as possible, trials should adhere to the principles of WHO and International Conference on Harmonisation (ICH) good clinical practice and should measure robust end-points.**
- **National regulatory bodies should expect producers either to provide data confirming the clinical efficacy and safety of their antivenoms, against envenoming by local species of venomous snakes or, to support in-country clinical testing of these products.**
- **Prospective observational studies are fundamental to ensuring the efficacy and safety of an antivenom when first used in a new geographical region.**
- **Postmarketing surveillance studies should play a major role in the evaluation of efficacy and safety of antivenoms.**

19 ROLE OF NATIONAL REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

The WHO Guidelines for national regulatory authorities on quality assurance of biological products (145, 146) state that national regulatory authorities should ensure that biological products distributed in their territories, whether imported or manufactured locally, are of good quality, safe and efficacious, and that manufacturers adhere to approved standards regarding quality assurance and good manufacturing practices. The responsibilities include the enforcement and implementation of effective national regulations, and the setting of appropriate standards and control measures.

National regulatory authorities should increasingly play a pivotal role in ensuring the quality, safety and efficacy of antivenoms. In the procedure for granting the marketing authorization for an antivenom, information on the starting material, hyperimmune animal derived plasma, the production processes and the test methods to characterize batches of the product need to be documented as part of the dossier. An example of a summary protocol of manufacturing and control of snake antivenom immunoglobulins to assist national regulatory authorities in reviewing the quality of antivenom batches is shown in Appendix 2.

Assurance of the quality, safety and efficacy of snake antivenoms involves the evaluation of information with regard to:

- the preparation of snake venom batches representative of the poisonous animals and geographical region where the antivenom will be distributed
- the control and traceability of immunized animals and animal immunization process
- the collection, storage and transport of the hyperimmune plasma
- the fractionation of the plasma and downstream processes to produce the antivenoms;
- the test methods used to control batches of the product;
- the preclinical data supporting the expected efficacy of the products for treatment of local envenomings;
- the clinical efficacy of locally manufactured or imported antivenoms against the species of snakes found in the country, through active marketing surveillance.

19.1 Impact of good manufacturing practices

Implementing the principles of GMP applied to the production of therapeutic products is acknowledged as essential for assuring the quality and safety of biological medicinal products. This approach becomes even more important and more complex due to the nature of the production process and the complexity and local specificities of snake envenomings. The implementation of an appropriate quality assurance system at all stages of manufacture, should be a pivotal element in ensuring the quality and safety of antivenoms. The following benefits derived from the compliance with GMP:

- ensures the application of quality assurance principles at all steps involved in the production of animal plasma and the fractionation process of antivenoms;
- reduces errors and technical problems at all stages of manufacture of plasma for fractionation and antivenoms;
- ensures that only products which comply with quality and safety requirements, and their marketing authorization, are released for supply;
- ensures adequate documentation and full traceability of plasma for fractionation and antivenom production;
- enables continuous improvement in production of plasma for fractionation and antivenoms;
- provides the basis for the national regulatory authorities to assess the compliance status of a manufacturer of antivenoms, either local or abroad;

19.2 Establishment licence and Inspections

The enforcement and implementation of inspection and licensing regulatory systems are fundamental tools to ensure the quality of antivenom immunoglobulins to treat snakebite envenomings. In many countries national regulatory authorities have implemented a control system based on licensing the establishments, inspecting them regularly, and enforcing the implementation of the legal requirements and applicable GMP standards. This should apply to the production of animal hyperimmune plasma for fractionation, and the manufacturing processes of the antivenoms. The inspections and control measures should be carried out by officials, representing the competent national regulatory authority. It is the responsibility of the inspector from the national regulatory authority to ensure that manufacturers adhere to the approved standards of GMP and quality assurance.

Establishments involved in all or some stages of the manufacture of antivenoms should have an establishment licence and be inspected by the competent national regulatory authority. To obtain the licence, the establishments need to show that their operation ensures compliance with a defined set of requirements supporting the safety, quality and efficacy of the antivenoms. A system control for the venoms and for the animals should be in place as part of the procedures established for the production of animal plasma for fractionation.

Inspections may follow common inspection procedures, including an opening meeting, inspection of main areas and activities for compliance with GMP requirements, a closing meeting, preparation of an inspection report and follow up of any deficiencies noted. The GMP requirements that should be covered during an inspection include verifying that all manufacturing processes and quality control tests are clearly defined and if necessary validated; all necessary resources are provided, including appropriately qualified and trained personnel, adequate premises, suitable equipment and services, appropriate materials, containers and labels, and suitable storage and transport; instructions and procedures are documented, approved,

implemented and maintained; records are kept and there is a system for handling complaints and product recall.

A thorough inspection includes the observation of staff during performance of operations and comparison with established standard operating procedures. The inspection should not only be considered as checking compliance with procedures, but also as an indirect product quality assessment by checking product-specific validation and quality control data.

A written report should summarize the main findings of the inspection including its scope, a description of the establishment, the deficiencies listed, specified and classified (e.g. as critical, major or minor), and a conclusion. The written report is sent to the manufacturer. The manufacturers are requested to notify the national regulatory authority about the specific steps which are being taken or are planned to correct the failures and to prevent their recurrence. If necessary, follow-up inspections should be performed to verify the successful implementation of specific corrective actions.

The national regulatory authority should have the authority to withdraw an establishment licence if an inspection reveals critical non-compliance with the requirements or product specifications.

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Chapter 5 and Appendix 1 of these Guidelines, on distribution of the venomous snakes of the highest medical importance worldwide, provides extremely valuable and detailed information that will assist manufacturers, regulators, public health officials, governments and nongovernmental organizations, as well as international procurement agencies, to make informed decisions with regard to the antivenoms to be considered within a particular region, country or territory. This Appendix was prepared by Mr D. Williams, Australian Venom Research Unit/Nossal Institute for Global Health, School of Medicine, University of Melbourne; Dr M. O'Shea, Australian Venom Research Unit, School of Medicine, University of Melbourne and Dr W. Wüster, School of Biological Sciences, University of Wales. The final Draft of the Appendix was reviewed by Dr D. Broadley, The National Museum of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe; Dr J.P. Chippaux, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), La Paz, Bolivia; Dr B. Currie, Menzies School for Health Research, Darwin, Australia; Dr J.M. Gutiérrez, Instituto Clodomiro Picado, University of Costa Rica, San José, Costa Rica; Dr U. Kuch, Biodiversität und Klima, Germany; Dr S. Seifert, USA; Professor D.A. Warrell, University of Oxford, England; Professor J. White, Women's and Children Hospital, Adelaide, Australia.

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APPENDIX 1

Worldwide distribution of medically important venomous snakes

Venomous snakes are widely distributed especially in tropical countries, from sea level to altitudes of up to 4 900 metres (*Gloydius himalayanus*). The European adder (*Vipera berus*) enters the Arctic Circle, and the Argentine Yarananata (*Bothrops ammodytoides*) occurs to 47 °S and is the most southerly occurring venomous snake. No other venomous species occur in cold regions such as the Arctic, Antarctic and north of about latitude 51 °N in North America (Newfoundland, Nova Scotia).

This Appendix lists venomous snake species considered to represent the greatest threat to public health in various countries, territories and other areas or regions around the world.

Only species that fall into one of the two categories listed below are shown, and category listings are in alphabetical order according to taxonomic family, genus and species. The intention in categorizing these medically important snakes into two groups is to provide users of the Guidelines with a prioritized listing. Species listed in Category 1 within a country, territory or area should be considered as being of highest priority for antivenom production on the basis that available knowledge implicates them as being responsible for the greater burden in that particular setting.

Definitions of Category 1 and Category 2 are:

CATEGORY 1: Highest medical importance

Definition: Highly venomous snakes which are common or widespread and cause numerous snakebites, resulting in high levels of morbidity, disability or mortality.

CATEGORY 2: Secondary medical importance

Definition: Highly venomous snakes capable of causing morbidity, disability or death, for which exact epidemiological or clinical data may be lacking; and/or which are less frequently implicated (due to their activity cycles, behaviour, habitat preferences or occurrence in areas remote to large human populations).

There are numerous other venomous species that rank as lesser threats in countries, territories and other areas listed here, and interested readers should refer to herpetological references in these guidelines. It should be noted that over time, as more information becomes available, new species may be added to these lists, and/or some species, currently defined within Category 1 or Category 2 may be re-ranked.

It should also be noted that the organization of countries, territories and other areas in this Appendix does not follow the WHO regional organization, but is instead arranged biogeographically in alphabetical order of country, territory or geographical area. This approach was necessary to reflect the geographical distribution of major groups of venomous snakes throughout the world. For example, the venomous snakes of the eastern Indonesian Province of Papua have bio-geographical origins in Australo-Papua, and are evolutionarily distinct from the venomous snakes of Asian origin that occur west of Wallace's Line which runs south of the Philippines, between Borneo and Sulawesi, and between Bali and Lombok separates the biogeographical regions of Asia and Australia. For this reason, we have listed the medically important snakes of Indonesian Papua in the Australo-Papuan region, rather than the South-East Asian region.

Users of this Appendix should also recognize that the relative risk of injury from a particular species may vary from one country, territory or area to another. For this reason, some species that have been listed under Category 1 in one country, territory or area may have been listed under Category 2 in another country territory or area, as a reflection of the different risk posed by that species in different locations. Assignment to Category 1 or Category 2 was based in some cases on the relative importance of a species as a cause of snakebite. In Europe for example, the overall incidence of snakebite is trivial compared to that in West Africa or India, but where a European species (such as *Vipera berus*) is a major (or sole) cause of envenoming where it occurs, this warrants ranking it as a medically important species in that setting.

AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Island populations

Off the coast of Africa, there are no medically important snakes in Mauritius, Réunion, Rodrigues, the Comoros, the Canary Islands, the Cape Verde Islands or the Seychelles. The islands that do have venomous snakes include the Lamu group, Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafia Islands, the Bazaruto Archipelago and Inhaca Island, São Tomé, Príncipe, Bioko (Fernando Po) and Dahlak Islands. The venomous snakes on these islands tend to be similar to those on the adjacent mainland. A colubrid, *Madagascarophis meridionalis*, and perhaps other species of the same genus, are the only terrestrial snakes of possible, if minimal, medical importance found in Madagascar.

North Africa

Algeria:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja haje</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> ; <i>Daboia mauritanica</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia deserti</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis leucogaster</i> ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> ; <i>Vipera latastei</i>

Egypt:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja haje</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> ; <i>Echis coloratus</i> (east), <i>Echis pyramidum</i> ;
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis engaddensis</i> (Sinai); <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja nubiae</i> ¹ ; <i>Walterinnesia aegyptia</i> (Sinai); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Pseudocerastes fieldi</i>

The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja haje</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> ; <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia deserti</i> ¹

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Morocco:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja haje</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> ; <i>Daboia mauritanica</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis leucogaster</i> ; <i>Vipera latastei</i>

Tunisia:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia mauritanica</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja haje</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> ; <i>Daboia deserti</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis leucogaster</i> ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> ; <i>Vipera latastei</i>

Western Sahara:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja haje</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>

Central sub Saharan Africa

Angola:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja anchietae</i> ¹ , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> , <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> , <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> (north); <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja christyi</i> ¹ (Cabinda), <i>Naja mossambica</i> (south), <i>Naja nigricincta</i> ¹ (south-west); <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris squamigera</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> (Cabinda)

Burundi:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> , <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis mossambicanus</i> ¹ ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i>

The Central African Republic:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis ocellatus</i> , <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja annulata</i> ¹ , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ² ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris broadleyi</i> , <i>Atheris squamigera</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> ¹

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

² The medical importance of this species may be higher in the primary forest zone of the south-western Central African Republic, and in some secondary forest mosaic zones elsewhere in the Central African Republic.

Chad:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> (south); <i>Echis ocellatus</i> (south)
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja nubiae</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i>

The Congo:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja annulata</i> ¹ , <i>Naja christyi</i> ¹ , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris squamigera</i> ; <i>Bitis arietans</i>

The Democratic Republic of the Congo:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> , <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> , <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja anchietae</i> ¹ (Katanga pedicle), <i>Naja annulata</i> ¹ , <i>Naja christyi</i> ¹ , <i>Naja haje</i> (north); <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris squamigera</i>

Equatorial Guinea:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja annulata</i> ¹ ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris squamigera</i>

Gabon:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja annulata</i> ¹ ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris squamigera</i> ; <i>Bitis arietans</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Rwanda:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> , <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja annulata</i> ¹ , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i>

East sub Saharan Africa**Djibouti:**

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis fallax</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja pallida</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>

Eritrea:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja haje</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja nubiae</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis megaloccephalus</i>

Ethiopia:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja ashei</i> ¹ (south-east), <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis fallax</i> , <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> (Mount Bizen); <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja pallida</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis parviocula</i>

Kenya:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis angusticeps</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja ashei</i> ¹ (north & east), <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> , <i>Atractaspis fallax</i> , <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis mossambicanus</i> ¹ , <i>Thelotornis usambaricus</i> ¹ (east coast); <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> (west & coastal forest), <i>Naja pallida</i> (north & east); <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris squamigera</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ (west)

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Malawi:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis angusticeps</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja annulifera</i> ¹ , <i>Naja mossambica</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> , <i>Thelotornis mossambicanus</i> ¹ ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Proatheris superciliaris</i>

Mozambique:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis angusticeps</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja annulifera</i> ¹ , <i>Naja mossambica</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> , <i>Thelotornis mossambicanus</i> ¹ ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Hemachatus haemachatus</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Proatheris superciliaris</i>

Somalia:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja ashei</i> ¹ (south); <i>Naja haje</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis fallax</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis mossambicanus</i> ¹ ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja pallida</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis hughesi</i> (north)

The Sudan:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis pyramidum</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis fallax</i> , <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> (south); <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> (south), <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> (south); <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> (south), <i>Naja nubiae</i> ¹ , <i>Naja pallida</i> (south-east); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ (south), <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> (south); <i>Cerastes cerastes</i>

Uganda:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja ashei</i> ¹ (north-east), <i>Naja haje</i> (north), <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris squamigera</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

The United Republic of Tanzania:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis angusticeps</i> , <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja mossambica</i> (including Pemba Island), <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> , <i>Atractaspis fallax</i> (north), <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> (north-east); <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> , <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> (Mahali and Udzungwa Mountains), <i>Thelotornis mossambicanus</i> ¹ , <i>Thelotornis usambaricus</i> ¹ (East Usambara Mountains); <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja ashei</i> ¹ (reported in north-east), <i>Naja annulata</i> ¹ , <i>Naja haje</i> (north), <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> (west and coast, including Mafia Island), <i>Naja pallida</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris squamigera</i> ; <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ (west and south-east), <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> (north); <i>Proatheris superciliaris</i>

Zambia:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja anchietae</i> ¹ , <i>Naja annulifera</i> ¹ , <i>Naja mossambica</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> , <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> , <i>Thelotornis mossambicanus</i> ¹ ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja annulata</i> ¹ , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i>

South sub Saharan Africa**Botswana:**

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja anchietae</i> ¹ (west), <i>Naja annulifera</i> ¹ (east), <i>Naja mossambica</i> , <i>Naja nivea</i> (south-west); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i>

Lesotho:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja nivea</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Hemachatus haemachatus</i>

Namibia:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja anchietae</i> ¹ , <i>Naja nivea</i> (central & southern), <i>Naja mossambica</i> (north-east), <i>Naja nigricincta</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja nigricollis</i> (Caprivi)

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

South Africa:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis angusticeps</i> (Natal), <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja annulifera</i> ¹ (north-east), <i>Naja nivea</i> , <i>Naja mossambica</i> (north-east); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Hemachatus haemachatus</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> (Natal), <i>Naja nigricincta</i> ¹ (north-west); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ (Natal);

Swaziland:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja annulifera</i> ¹ <i>Naja mossambica</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Hemachatus haemachatus</i>

Zimbabwe:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja anchietae</i> ¹ (west), <i>Naja annulifera</i> ¹ , <i>Naja mossambica</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis bibronii</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis capensis</i> , <i>Thelotornis mossambicanus</i> ¹ ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis angusticeps</i> (east); <i>Hemachatus haemachatus</i> (Nyanga Mts); <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> (east); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ (east)

West sub Saharan Africa**Benin:**

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis ocellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ ; <i>Pseudohaje nigra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis rhinoceros</i> , <i>Echis leucogaster</i> (far north)

Burkina Faso:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , <i>Naja katiensis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis ocellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis leucogaster</i>

Cameroon:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja haje</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ² ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> ; <i>Echis ocellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja annulata</i> ¹ , <i>Naja katiensis</i> ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris broadleyi</i> (East Province), <i>Atheris squamigera</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.² This large, highly venomous snake is common in forested areas of south-west Cameroon and a high burden of injury may be expected, although clinical data with direct attribution are not yet available.

Côte d’Ivoire:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> ; <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> , <i>Bitis rhinoceros</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis ocellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Naja katiensis</i> ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> , <i>Pseudohaje nigra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris chlorechis</i>

The Gambia:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> ; <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis jogeri</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹

Ghana:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis ocellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> , <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ² ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> , <i>Pseudohaje nigra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris chlorechis</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> , <i>Bitis rhinoceros</i> ¹

Guinea:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> , <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> ; <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis jogeri</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Pseudohaje nigra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris chlorechis</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> , <i>Bitis rhinoceros</i> ¹

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

² The medical importance of this species may be higher in the forested zone of southern Ghana.

Guinea-Bissau:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> ; <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis jogeri</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis rhinoceros</i> ¹

Liberia:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Pseudohaje nigra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris chlorechis</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> , <i>Bitis rhinoceros</i> ¹

Mali:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis jogeri</i> (west); <i>Echis leucogaster</i> ; <i>Echis ocellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i>

Mauritania:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ (south-east); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> ; <i>Echis leucogaster</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>

The Niger:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis leucogaster</i> , <i>Echis ocellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja haje</i> (south-central), <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja nubiae</i> ¹ ; <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ (south-west); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Nigeria:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja haje</i> (north-east), <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> , <i>Bitis gabonica</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis ocellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ² ; <i>Naja senegalensis</i> (north-west); <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> , <i>Pseudohaje nigra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris squamigera</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> ; <i>Echis leucogaster</i> (north)

Sao Tome and Principe:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i>
Cat 2:	None

Senegal:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja katiensis</i> ; <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis leucogaster</i> ; <i>Echis jogeri</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis polylepis</i> ; <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> ; <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i>

Sierra Leone:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> ; <i>Naja nigricollis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ³ ; <i>Pseudohaje nigra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris chlorechis</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> , <i>Bitis rhinoceros</i> ¹

Togo:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja nigricollis</i> , <i>Naja senegalensis</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> (south); <i>Echis ocellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis irregularis</i> ; <u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Dispholidus typus</i> ; <i>Thelotornis kirtlandii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Dendroaspis jamesoni</i> , <i>Dendroaspis viridis</i> ; <i>Naja katiensis</i> , <i>Naja melanoleuca</i> ; <i>Pseudohaje goldii</i> , <i>Pseudohaje nigra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Atheris chlorechis</i> ; <i>Bitis nasicornis</i> , <i>Bitis rhinoceros</i> ¹

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

² The medical importance of this species may be higher in the southern rainforest belt of Nigeria, from Ibadan in the west to Oban and Eket in the east, and in the forested southern quarter of Sierra Leone.

³ The medical importance of this species may be higher in the forested southern quarter of Sierra Leone.

Middle East**Cyprus:**

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i>

Iran (Islamic Republic of):

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja oxiana</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis carinatus</i> ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> ; <i>Pseudocerastes persicus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Walterinnesia morgani</i> ¹ (west); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Eristicophis macmahonii</i> (east); <i>Gloydius halys caucasicus</i> ; <i>Montivipera raddei</i> ; <i>Vipera</i> spp.

Iraq:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis carinatus</i> ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Walterinnesia morgani</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes gasperettii</i> ; <i>Pseudocerastes fieldi</i> , <i>Pseudocerastes persicus</i>

Israel

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia palaestinae</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis coloratus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis engaddensis</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Walterinnesia aegyptia</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> , <i>Cerastes gasperettii</i> ; <i>Pseudocerastes fieldi</i>

Jordan:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia palaestinae</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis coloratus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis engaddensis</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Walterinnesia aegyptia</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes gasperettii</i> ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> ; <i>Pseudocerastes fieldi</i>

Kuwait and Qatar:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes gasperettii</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Walterinnesia morgani</i> ¹ (Kuwait)

Lebanon:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia palaestinae</i> ¹ ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i>
Cat 2:	None

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Oman:

Cat 1:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis andersonii</i> (south-west); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> (south-west); <i>Echis coloratus</i> (south-west), <i>Echis carinatus</i> , <i>Echis omanensis</i> ¹ (north)
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja arabica</i> ¹ (south-west); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes gasperettii</i> ; <i>Echis khosatzkii</i> (south-west); <i>Pseudocerastes persicus</i>

Saudi Arabia:

Cat 1:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis andersonii</i> (south-west); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes gasperettii</i> ; <i>Echis coloratus</i> , <i>Echis borkini</i> ¹ (south-west)
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis engaddensis</i> (north-west); <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja arabica</i> (south-west); <i>Walterinnesia aegyptia</i> (west), <i>Walterinnesia morgani</i> ¹ (central & south); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> (south-west); <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> (south-west); <i>Pseudocerastes fieldi</i>

The Syrian Arab Republic:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia palaestinae</i> ¹ ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Pseudocerastes fieldi</i>

Turkey:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> ; <i>Montivipera xanthina</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Walterinnesia morgani</i> ¹ (south); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Montivipera raddei</i> ¹ ; <i>Vipera ammodytes</i> ; <i>Vipera eriwanensis</i> ; <i>Vipera spp.</i>

The United Arab Emirates:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis carinatus</i> (east); <i>Echis omanensis</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes gasperettii</i> ; <i>Pseudocerastes persicus</i>

West Bank and Gaza Strip:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia palaestinae</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis coloratus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis engaddensis</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Walterinnesia aegyptia</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> , <i>Pseudocerastes fieldi</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Yemen:

Cat 1:	<u>Atractaspididae</u> : <i>Atractaspis andersonii</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja arabica</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bitis arietans</i> ; <i>Echis borkini</i> ¹ , <i>Echis coloratus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cerastes cerastes</i> , <i>Cerastes gasperettii</i> ; <i>Echis khosatzkii</i>

ASIA AND AUSTRALASIA

Central Asia

Armenia:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> ;
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Montivipera raddei</i> ¹ ; <i>Vipera eriwanensis</i> , <i>Vipera</i> spp.

Azerbaijan:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Gloydius halys</i> ; <i>Vipera eriwanensis</i> ; <i>Vipera</i> spp.

Georgia:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> ; <i>Vipera ammodytes</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera renardi</i> , <i>Vipera ursinii</i> , <i>Vipera</i> spp.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja oxiana</i> (except Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis carinatus</i> (except Kyrgyzstan); <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> (except Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan); <i>Gloydius halys</i> (throughout)
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera renardi</i> (except Turkmenistan)

Mongolia:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Gloydius halys</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera berus</i> , <i>Vipera renardi</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

East Asia**China:***China Mainland*

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus multicinctus</i> ; <i>Naja atra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ ; <i>Daboia siamensis</i> ¹ ; <i>Deinagkistrodon acutus</i> ; <i>Gloydius brevicaudus</i> ; <i>Protobothrops mucrosquamatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Rhabdophis tigrinus</i> ; <u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus bungaroides</i> (south-east Tibet), <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> ; <i>Naja kaouthia</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops septentrionalis</i> (south Tibet); <i>Gloydius halys</i> , <i>Gloydius intermedius</i> ¹ , <i>Gloydius ussuriensis</i> ; <i>Himalayophis tibetanus</i> (south Tibet); <i>Protobothrops jerdonii</i> , <i>Protobothrops kaulbacki</i> , <i>Protobothrops mangshanensis</i> ¹ ; <i>Vipera berus</i> (Jilin, western Xinjiang); <i>Vipera renardi</i> (western Xinjiang); <i>Viridovipera stejnegeri</i> ¹

Hong Kong, Special Administrative Region

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus multicinctus</i> ; <i>Naja atra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹
Cat 2:	None

Taiwan Province

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus multicinctus</i> ; <i>Naja atra</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Protobothrops mucrosquamatus</i> ; <i>Viridovipera stejnegeri</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Deinagkistrodon acutus</i> ; <i>Daboia siamensis</i> ¹

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Gloydius brevicaudus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Gloydius intermedius</i> ¹ , <i>Gloydius ussuriensis</i> ; <i>Vipera berus</i>

Japan (including Ryukyu Islands):

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Gloydius blomhoffii</i> (main islands); <i>Protobothrops flavoviridis</i> (Ryukyu Islands)
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Rhabdophis tigrinus</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Gloydius tsushimaensis</i> (Tsushima); <i>Protobothrops elegans</i>

The Republic of Korea:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Gloydius brevicaudus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Colubridae</u> : <i>Rhabdophis tigrinus</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Gloydius intermedius</i> ¹ , <i>Gloydius ussuriensis</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

South Asia**Afghanistan:**

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Naja oxiana</i> ; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Echis carinatus</i> ; <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i> (east), <i>Bungarus sindanus</i> (east), <i>Naja naja</i> (reported in south-east); <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Eristicophis macmahonii</i> (south-west); <i>Gloydius halys</i> (north)

Bangladesh:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i> , <i>Bungarus niger</i> , <i>Bungarus walli</i> ; <i>Naja kaouthia</i> ; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Cryptelytrops erythrurus</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Bungarus bungaroides</i> , <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> , <i>Bungarus lividus</i> ; <i>Naja naja</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ (far north-west); <i>Daboia russelii</i> ¹ (west)

Bhutan:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Bungarus niger</i> ; <i>Naja naja</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i> , <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> ; <i>Bungarus lividus</i> ; <i>Naja kaouthia</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Cryptelytrops erythrurus</i> ¹ ; <i>Daboia russelii</i> ¹ ; <i>Protobothrops jerdonii</i>

India:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i> ; <i>Naja kaouthia</i> (east), <i>Naja naja</i> (throughout); <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Daboia russelii</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis carinatus</i> ; <i>Hypnale hypnale</i> (south-west)
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Bungarus bungaroides</i> , <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> , <i>Bungarus lividus</i> , <i>Bungarus niger</i> , <i>Bungarus sindanus</i> , <i>Bungarus walli</i> ; <i>Naja oxiana</i> (west), <i>Naja sagittifera</i> (Andaman Islands); <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> (south, north-east, Andaman Islands); <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ , <i>Cryptelytrops erythrurus</i> ¹ , <i>Cryptelytrops septentrionalis</i> ¹ ; <i>Gloydius himalayanus</i> ; <i>Protobothrops jerdonii</i> , <i>Protobothrops kaulbacki</i> , <i>Protobothrops mucrosquamatus</i> ; <i>Trimeresurus gramineus</i> (south India), <i>Trimeresurus malabaricus</i> (south-west),

Nepal:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i> , <i>Bungarus niger</i> ; <i>Naja naja</i> , <i>Naja kaouthia</i> ; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Daboia russelii</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Bungarus bungaroides</i> , <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> ; <i>Bungarus lividus</i> , <i>Bungarus walli</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Cryptelytrops septentrionalis</i> ¹ ; <i>Gloydius himalayanus</i> ; <i>Himalayophis tibetanus</i> ¹ ; <i>Protobothrops jerdonii</i> ;

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Pakistan:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i> , <i>Bungarus sindanus</i> ; <i>Naja naja</i> , <i>Naja oxiana</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia russelii</i> ¹ ; <i>Echis carinatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Eristicophis macmahonii</i> (west); <i>Gloydius himalayanus</i> (north); <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> (west)

Sri Lanka:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i> ; <i>Naja naja</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Daboia russelii</i> ¹ ; <i>Hypnale hypnale</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus ceylonicus</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Echis carinatus</i> ; <i>Hypnale nepa</i> , <i>Trimeresurus trigonocephalus</i>

South-east Asia

Brunei Darussalam:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja sumatrana</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> , <i>Bungarus flaviceps</i> ; <i>Calliophis bivirgatus</i> , <i>Calliophis intestinalis</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Parias sumatranus</i> ¹ ; <i>Tropidolaemus subannulatus</i>

Cambodia:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus candidus</i> ; <i>Naja kaouthia</i> , <i>Naja siamensis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Calloselasma rhodostoma</i> ; <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ ; <i>Daboia siamensis</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> , <i>Bungarus flaviceps</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops macrops</i> ¹

Indonesia (Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Sulawesi & Lesser Sunda Islands):

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus candidus</i> (Sumatra & Java); <i>Naja sputatrix</i> (Java & Lesser Sunda Islands), <i>Naja sumatrana</i> (Sumatra & Borneo); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Calloselasma rhodostoma</i> (Java); <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ ; <i>Daboia siamensis</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> , <i>Bungarus flaviceps</i> (Sumatra & Borneo); <i>Calliophis bivirgatus</i> , <i>Calliophis intestinalis</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> (Sumatra, Borneo & Java); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops insularis</i> ¹ , <i>Cryptelytrops purpureomaculatus</i> ¹ (Sumatra); <i>Parias sumatranus</i> ; <i>Tropidolaemus subannulatus</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus candidus</i> , <i>Bungarus multicinctus</i> ; <i>Naja atra</i> (north), <i>Naja siamensis</i> ¹ (south & east); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Calloselasma rhodostoma</i> ; <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> ; <i>Naja kaouthia</i> (south & east); <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops macrops</i> ; <i>Protobothrops jerdonii</i> ; <i>Protobothrops mucrosquamatus</i>

Malaysia:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus candidus</i> (Peninsular Malaysia); <i>Naja kaouthia</i> (northern Peninsular Malaysia), <i>Naja sumatrana</i> (Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah & Sarawak); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Calloselasma rhodostoma</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> , <i>Bungarus flaviceps</i> ; <i>Calliophis bivirgatus</i> ; <i>Calliophis intestinalis</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops purpureomaculatus</i> ¹ ; <i>Parias sumatranus</i> ¹ ; <i>Tropidolaemus subannulatus</i>

Myanmar:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus magnimaculatus</i> , <i>Bungarus multicinctus</i> ; <i>Naja kaouthia</i> , <i>Naja mandalayensis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ , <i>Cryptelytrops erythrus</i> ¹ ; <i>Daboia siamensis</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus bungaroides</i> (Kachin State), <i>Bungarus candidus</i> (Thaninthayi Div.); <i>Bungarus flaviceps</i> (east Shan State), <i>Bungarus niger</i> (Chin State and Rakhine State); <i>Naja siamensis</i> (adjacent Thailand border) <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Calloselasma rhodostoma</i> (Thaninthayi Div.); <i>Cryptelytrops purpureomaculatus</i> ; <i>Protobothrops jerdonii</i> , <i>Protobothrops kaulbacki</i> , <i>Protobothrops mucrosquamatus</i> (Kachin)

The Philippines:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja philippinensis</i> (Luzon), <i>Naja samarensis</i> (Mindanao), <i>Naja sumatrana</i> (Palawan)
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Calliophis intestinalis</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Parias flavomaculatus</i> ¹ ; <i>Tropidolaemus philippensis</i> ¹ ; <i>Tropidolaemus subannulatus</i> ¹

Singapore:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus candidus</i> ; <i>Naja sumatrana</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> ; <i>Calliophis bivirgatus</i> , <i>Calliophis intestinalis</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops purpureomaculatus</i> ¹

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Thailand:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus candidus</i> ; <i>Naja kaouthia</i> , <i>Naja siamensis</i> ¹ ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Calloselasma rhodostoma</i> ; <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ , <i>Daboia siamensis</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> , <i>Bungarus flaviceps</i> ; <i>Calliophis bivirgatus</i> , <i>Calliophis intestinalis</i> ; <i>Naja sumatrana</i> ; <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops macrops</i> ¹ ; <i>Parias sumatranus</i>

Timor-Leste:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops insularis</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Naja sputatrix</i> (reported)

Viet Nam:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus candidus</i> , <i>Bungarus multicinctus</i> , <i>Bungarus slowinskii</i> (north); <i>Naja atra</i> (north), <i>Naja kaouthia</i> (south); <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Calloselasma rhodostoma</i> ; <i>Cryptelytrops albolabris</i> ¹ (throughout); <i>Deinagkistrodon acutus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> , <i>Bungarus flaviceps</i> (south); <i>Naja siamensis</i> (south); <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Cryptelytrops macrops</i> ¹ ; <i>Protobothrops jerdonii</i> , <i>Protobothrops mucrosquamatus</i> (north); <i>Viridovipera stejnegeri</i> ¹

Australo-Papua (including Pacific Islands):

There are no medically important land snakes in American Samoa; Cook Islands; Fiji; French Polynesia; Guam; Kiribati; Marshall Islands; Nauru; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Northern Mariana Islands; Pitcairn Island; Samoa; Tokelau; Tonga; Tuvalu; or Wallis and Futuna Islands. Fiji possesses a single terrestrial venomous snake species (*Ogmodon vitianus*) while the Solomon Islands possess three terrestrial venomous species (*Salomonelaps par*; *Loveridgelaps elapoides* and *Parapistocalamus hedigeri*) with no and few snakebites, respectively.

Australia:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Notechis scutatus</i> ; <i>Pseudechis australis</i> ² ; <i>Pseudonaja affinis</i> , <i>Pseudonaja mengdeni</i> ¹ , <i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i> , <i>Pseudonaja textilis</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Acanthophis antarcticus</i> , <i>Acanthophis</i> spp.; <i>Austrelaps</i> spp.; <i>Hoplocephalus</i> spp.; <i>Oxyuranus microlepidotus</i> , <i>Oxyuranus scutellatus</i> , <i>Oxyuranus temporalis</i> ; <i>Pseudechis</i> spp.; <i>Pseudonaja aspidorhyncha</i> ¹ , <i>Pseudonaja</i> spp.; <i>Tropidechis carinatus</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

² *Pseudechis australis* is common and widespread and causes numerous snakebites; bites may be severe, although this species has not caused a fatality in Australia since 1968.

Indonesia (West Papua and Maluku):

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Acanthophis laevis</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Acanthophis rugosus</i> ¹ ; <i>Micropechis ikaheka</i> ; <i>Oxyuranus scutellatus</i> ; <i>Pseudechis papuanus</i> , <i>Pseudechis rosignolii</i> ¹ ; <i>Pseudonaja textilis</i>

Papua New Guinea:

Cat 1:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Acanthophis laevis</i> ¹ ; <i>Oxyuranus scutellatus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Acanthophis rugosus</i> ¹ ; <i>Micropechis ikaheka</i> ; <i>Pseudonaja textilis</i> ; <i>Pseudechis papuanus</i> , <i>Pseudechis rosignolii</i> ¹

EUROPE

There are no venomous snakes in Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Outer Hebrides, Orkney or Shetland Islands. Crete and most of the islands of the western Mediterranean are also without venomous snakes.

Central Europe

Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Croatia; Romania; Serbia; Montenegro; Slovenia; The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Vipera ammodytes</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Vipera berus</i> , <i>Vipera ursinii</i>

The Czech Republic; Poland; Slovakia:

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Vipera berus</i>

Greece:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Vipera ammodytes</i> (including Corfu)
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Macrovipera schweizeri</i> ; <i>Montivipera xanthina</i> ¹ ; <i>Vipera berus</i> , <i>Vipera ursinii</i>

Hungary:

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Vipera berus</i> ; <i>Vipera ursinii</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Eastern Europe**Belarus; Estonia; Latvia; Lithuania; The Republic of Moldova:**

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera berus</i> , <i>Vipera nikolskii</i> (Moldova), <i>Vipera ursinii</i> (Moldova)

The Russian Federation:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera berus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Gloydius halys</i> , <i>Gloydius intermedius</i> ¹ , <i>Gloydius ussuriensis</i> ; (far-east Russia); <i>Macrovipera lebetina</i> (Dagestan); <i>Vipera nikolskii</i> ; <i>Vipera renardi</i> , <i>Vipera spp.</i>

Ukraine:

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera berus</i> , <i>Vipera nikolskii</i> , <i>Vipera renardi</i> , <i>Vipera ursinii</i>

Western Europe**Austria:**

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera ammodytes</i> , <i>Vipera berus</i>

Belgium; Denmark; Finland; Germany; The Netherlands; Norway:

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera berus</i>

France:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera aspis</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera berus</i> , <i>Vipera ursinii</i>

Italy:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera aspis</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera ammodytes</i> , <i>Vipera berus</i> , <i>Vipera ursinii</i>

Portugal:

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera latastei</i> , <i>Vipera seoanei</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Spain:

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera aspis</i> , <i>Vipera latastei</i> , <i>Vipera seoanei</i>

Sweden; The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera berus</i> (not Northern Ireland)
Cat 2:	None

Switzerland:

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Vipera aspis</i> , <i>Vipera berus</i>

THE AMERICAS**North America****Canada:**

Cat 1:	None
Cat 2:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Crotalus oreganus</i> ¹ , <i>Crotalus viridis</i> , <i>Sistrurus catenatus</i>

Mexico:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Agkistrodon bilineatus</i> , <i>Agkistrodon taylori</i> ¹ ; <i>Crotalus atrox</i> , <i>Crotalus scutulatus</i> , <i>Crotalus simus</i> ¹ , <i>Crotalus totonacus</i> ¹ ; <i>Bothrops asper</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micruroides euryxanthus</i> , <i>Micrurus nigrocinctus</i> , <i>Micrurus tener</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Agkistrodon contortrix</i> ; <i>Atropoides mexicanus</i> , <i>Atropoides occiduus</i> , <i>Atropoides</i> spp.; <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> , <i>Bothriechis</i> spp.; <i>Cerrophidion godmani</i> , <i>Cerrophidion</i> spp.; <i>Crotalus basiliscus</i> , <i>Crotalus molossus</i> , <i>Crotalus oreganus</i> ¹ , <i>Crotalus ruber</i> , <i>Crotalus tzabcan</i> ¹ , <i>Crotalus viridis</i> , <i>Crotalus</i> spp.; <i>Ophryacus</i> spp.; <i>Porthidium nasutum</i> , <i>Porthidium</i> spp.; <i>Sistrurus catenatus</i>

The United States of America:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Agkistrodon contortrix</i> , <i>Agkistrodon piscivorus</i> ; <i>Crotalus adamanteus</i> , <i>Crotalus atrox</i> , <i>Crotalus horridus</i> , <i>Crotalus oreganus</i> ¹ , <i>Crotalus scutulatus</i> , <i>Crotalus viridis</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus fulvius</i> , <i>Micrurus tener</i> ; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Crotalus molossus</i> , <i>Crotalus ruber</i> , <i>Crotalus</i> spp., <i>Sistrurus catenatus</i> , <i>Sistrurus miliarius</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Central America

The medically most important species are *Bothrops asper* and *Crotalus simus*¹.

Belize:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops asper</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Agkistrodon bilineatus</i> ; <i>Atropoides mexicanus</i> ; <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> ; <i>Crotalus tzabcan</i> ¹ ; <i>Porthidium nasutum</i>

Costa Rica:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops asper</i> ; <i>Crotalus simus</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus nigrocinctus</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Agkistrodon bilineatus</i> ; <i>Atropoides mexicanus</i> , <i>Atropoides</i> spp.; <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> , <i>Bothriechis lateralis</i> , <i>Bothriechis</i> spp.; <i>Cerrophidion godmani</i> ; <i>Lachesis melanocephala</i> , <i>Lachesis stenophrys</i> ; <i>Porthidium nasutum</i> , <i>Porthidium ophryomegas</i> , <i>Porthidium</i> spp.

El Salvador:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Crotalus simus</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus nigrocinctus</i> ; <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Agkistrodon bilineatus</i> ; <i>Atropoides occiduus</i> ; <i>Bothriechis</i> spp.; <i>Cerrophidion godmani</i> ; <i>Porthidium ophryomegas</i>

Guatemala:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops asper</i> ; <i>Crotalus simus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus nigrocinctus</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Agkistrodon bilineatus</i> ; <i>Atropoides mexicanus</i> , <i>Atropoides occiduus</i> , <i>Atropoides</i> spp.; <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> , <i>Bothriechis</i> spp.; <i>Cerrophidion godmani</i> ; <i>Crotalus tzabcan</i> ¹ , <i>Porthidium nasutum</i> , <i>Porthidium ophryomegas</i>

Honduras:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops asper</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus nigrocinctus</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Agkistrodon bilineatus</i> ; <i>Atropoides mexicanus</i> , <i>Atropoides occiduus</i> , <i>Atropoides</i> spp.; <i>Bothriechis marchi</i> , <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> , <i>Bothriechis</i> spp.; <i>Cerrophidion godmani</i> ; <i>Crotalus simus</i> ¹ ; <i>Porthidium nasutum</i> , <i>Porthidium ophryomegas</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Nicaragua:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops asper</i> ; <i>Crotalus simus</i> ¹
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus nigrocinctus</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Agkistrodon bilineatus</i> ; <i>Atropoides mexicanus</i> ; <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> ; <i>Cerrophidion godmani</i> ; <i>Lachesis stenophrys</i> ; <i>Porthidium nasutum</i> , <i>Porthidium ophryomegas</i>

Panama:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops asper</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus mipartitus</i> , <i>Micrurus nigrocinctus</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Atropoides mexicanus</i> , <i>Atropoides</i> spp.; <i>Bothriechis lateralis</i> , <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> , <i>Bothriechis</i> spp.; <i>Cerrophidion godmani</i> ; <i>Lachesis acrochorda</i> , <i>Lachesis stenophrys</i> ; <i>Porthidium nasutum</i> , <i>Porthidium lansbergii</i> , <i>Porthidium</i> spp.

Caribbean

No medically important snakes occur naturally in Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; the Bahamas; Barbados; Bermuda; The British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Cuba; Dominica; the Dominican Republic; Grenada; Guadeloupe; Haiti; Jamaica; Montserrat; the Netherlands Antilles; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; and Turks and Caicos Islands.

Aruba; Martinique; Saint Lucia; Trinidad and Tobago, and offshore islands:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops cf. atrox</i> (Trinidad), <i>Bothrops caribbaeus</i> (St Lucia), <i>Bothrops lanceolatus</i> (Martinique); <i>Crotalus durissus</i> (Aruba)
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus circinalis</i> (Trinidad), <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> (Trinidad); <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Lachesis muta</i> (Trinidad)

South America

No venomous snakes are naturally occurring in the Falkland Islands; and no dangerously venomous snakes are naturally occurring in Chile.

Argentina:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops alternatus</i> , <i>Bothrops diporus</i> ¹ <i>Crotalus durissus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus corallinus</i> , <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops ammodytoides</i> , <i>Bothrops jararaca</i> , <i>Bothrops jararacussu</i> , <i>Bothrops mattogrossensis</i> , <i>Bothrops neuwiedi</i> , <i>Bothrops pubescens</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Bolivia (Plurinational State of):

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops atrox</i> , <i>Bothrops matogrossensis</i> ¹ <i>Crotalus durissus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus spixii</i> , <i>Micrurus surinamensis</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrocophias hyoprora</i> , <i>Bothrocophias microphthalmus</i> ¹ ; <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i> , <i>Bothrops brazili</i> , <i>Bothrops jararacussu</i> , <i>Bothrops jonathani</i> , <i>Bothrops moojeni</i> , <i>Bothrops sanctaecrucis</i> , <i>Bothrops</i> spp., <i>Bothrops taeniatus</i> ; <i>Lachesis muta</i>

Brazil:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops atrox</i> , <i>Bothrops jararaca</i> , <i>Bothrops jararacussu</i> , <i>Bothrops leucurus</i> , <i>Bothrops moojeni</i> ; <i>Crotalus durissus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus corallinus</i> , <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus spixii</i> , <i>Micrurus surinamensis</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrocophias hyoprora</i> ¹ , <i>Bothrocophias microphthalmus</i> ¹ , <i>Bothrops alternatus</i> , <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i> , <i>Bothrops brazili</i> , <i>Bothrops diporus</i> , <i>Bothrops matogrossensis</i> , <i>Bothrops neuwiedi</i> , <i>Bothrops pubescens</i> , <i>Bothrops taeniatus</i> , <i>Bothrops</i> spp.; <i>Lachesis muta</i>

Colombia:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops asper</i> , <i>Bothrops atrox</i> , <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i> ; <i>Crotalus durissus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus mipartitus</i> , <i>Micrurus nigrocinctus</i> , <i>Micrurus spixii</i> , <i>Micrurus surinamensis</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> ; <i>Bothrocophias hyoprora</i> ¹ , <i>Bothrocophias microphthalmus</i> ¹ , <i>Bothrocophias</i> spp.; <i>Bothrops brazili</i> , <i>Bothrops taeniatus</i> , <i>Bothrops</i> spp.; <i>Lachesis acrochorda</i> ¹ , <i>Lachesis muta</i> ; <i>Porthidium nasutum</i> , <i>Porthidium lansbergii</i>

Ecuador:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops asper</i> , <i>Bothrops atrox</i> , <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i> ; <i>Lachesis muta</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus mipartitus</i> , <i>Micrurus spixii</i> , <i>Micrurus surinamensis</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> ; <i>Bothrocophias hyoprora</i> ¹ , <i>Bothrocophias microphthalmus</i> ¹ , <i>Bothrocophias</i> spp.; <i>Bothrops brazili</i> , <i>Bothrops taeniatus</i> , <i>Bothrops</i> spp.; <i>Lachesis acrochorda</i> ¹ ; <i>Porthidium nasutum</i> , <i>Porthidium</i> spp.

French Guiana (France):

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops atrox</i> , <i>Bothrops brazili</i> , <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i> ; <i>Crotalus durissus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae</u> : <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus surinamensis</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae</u> : <i>Bothrops taeniatus</i> ; <i>Lachesis muta</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

Guyana:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops atrox</i>, <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i>, <i>Bothrops brazili</i>, <i>Crotalus durissus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus surinamensis</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops taeniatus</i> ; <i>Lachesis muta</i>

Paraguay:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops alternatus</i>, <i>Crotalus durissus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus corallinus</i> , <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus spixii</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops diporus</i> , <i>Bothrops jararaca</i> , <i>Bothrops jararacussu</i> , <i>Bothrops mattogrossensis</i> , <i>Bothrops moojeni</i> , <i>Bothrops neuwiedi</i> , <i>Bothrops</i> spp.

Peru:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops atrox</i>, <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i>, <i>Bothrops pictus</i>, <i>Crotalus durissus</i>, <i>Lachesis muta</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus mipartitus</i> , <i>Micrurus spixii</i> , <i>Micrurus surinamensis</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> ; <i>Bothrocophias hyoprora</i> , <i>Bothrocophias microphthalmus</i> ; <i>Bothrops asper</i> ; <i>Bothrops brazili</i> , <i>Bothrops mattogrossensis</i> , <i>Bothrops taeniatus</i> , <i>Bothrops</i> spp.

Suriname:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops atrox</i>, <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i>, <i>Bothrops brazili</i>, <i>Crotalus durissus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus surinamensis</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops taeniatus</i> ; <i>Lachesis muta</i>

Uruguay:

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops alternatus</i>, <i>Crotalus durissus</i>
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus corallinus</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops pubescens</i> ¹

Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of):

Cat 1:	<u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothrops atrox</i>, <i>Bothrops cf. atrox</i>, <i>Bothrops venezuelensis</i>, <i>Crotalus durissus</i> (including Isla de Margarita)
Cat 2:	<u>Elapidae:</u> <i>Micrurus circinalis</i> , <i>Micrurus lemniscatus</i> , <i>Micrurus mipartitus</i> , <i>Micrurus spixii</i> , <i>Micrurus surinamensis</i> , <i>Micrurus</i> spp.; <u>Viperidae:</u> <i>Bothriechis schlegelii</i> ; <i>Bothrops asper</i> , <i>Bothrops brazili</i> , <i>Bothrops bilineatus</i> ; <i>Lachesis muta</i> ; <i>Porthidium lansbergii</i>

¹ Recent nomenclatural change. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for details of previous names.

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APPENDIX 2

Summary protocol for manufacturing and control of snake antivenom immunoglobulins

1. Antivenom batch information

- a. Name and address of manufacturer.....
- b. Batch number
- c. Date of filling
- d. Liquid or freeze-dried
- e. Expiry date
- f. Number of vials or ampoules.....
- g. Temperature of storage

2. Control of the venom batch(es) used for animal immunization

- a. Producer of venom and location
- b. Information on the snake contributing to the venom batch:
 - i. Scientific names of the snake species
 - ii. Number of snakes.....
 - iii. Geographical origins of the snakes
- c. Dates of collection of the venoms.....
- d. Expiry date of the venoms preparation
- e. Biochemical and biological characterization of the venoms
- Test performed
- Results.....

3. Control of plasma donor animals

- a. Location of the animal herd
- b. Animal species used for immunization.....
- c. Vaccinations performed
- d. Dates of animals immunization.....
- e. Control of antivenom antibody titre
- f. Veterinary certificate of health of animal donor

4. Collection and storage of plasma

- a. Method of collection
- b. Date of collection
- c. Date of storage
- d. Type of containers.....
- e. Temperature of storage
- f. Type and content of preservatives added (if any).....

5. Transport of plasma to fractionation facility

- a. Date of transport.....
- b. Temperature of transport.....
- c. Date of arrival

6. Plasma pooling and fractionation

- a. Temperature of plasma storage at fractionation facility.....
- b. Volume of plasmas of different specificity pooled for the production of polyspecific antivenoms (if applicable)
- c. Date of plasma pooling
- d. Volume of the manufacturing plasma pool
- e. Number of animal donors contributing to the manufacturing plasma pool
- f. Quality control of the manufacturing plasma pool
 - Test performed
 - Results
- g. Type of active substance (intact IgG, fragments)

7. Preparation and control of final bulk

- a. Volume of bulk antivenoms of different specificity pooled for the production of polyspecific antivenoms (if applicable).....
- b. Concentration of preservatives (if used)
 - Type.....
 - Method
 - Result.....
- c. Quality control of manufacturing plasma pool
 - Test performed
 - Results

8. Filling and containers

- a. Date of filling
- b. Quantity of containers
- c. Volume of antivenoms per container
- d. Date of freeze-drying (if any).....

9. Control tests on final product

- a. Appearance.....
- b. Solubility (freeze-dried product).....
- c. Extractable volume.....
- d. Venom-neutralizing potency test
 - Method
 - Venom used.....
 - Results
- e. Osmolality
- f. Identity test
 - Method
 - Result.....
- g. Protein concentration
 - Method
 - Result.....

- h. Purity
 - Method
 - Result
- i. Molecular size distribution
 - Method
 - Result
- j. Test for pyrogens
 - Method
 - Result
- k. Sterility test
 - No. of containers examined
 - Method
 - Date at start of test
 - Date at end of test.....
- l. Concentration of sodium chloride and other excipients
 - Method
 - Result
- m. Determination of pH
 - Result
- n. Concentration of preservatives (if used)
 - Type
 - Method
 - Result
- o. Chemical agents used in plasma fractionation
 - Type
 - Method
 - Result
- p. Inspection of final containers
 - Results.....
- q. Residual moisture in freeze-dried antivenoms
 - Method
 - Result

10. Internal certification

Certification by person taking overall responsibility for production of the antivenom

I certify that the batch No. of snake antivenom immunoglobulin satisfies the WHO Guidelines for the production, quality control and regulation of snake antivenom immunoglobulins.

Signature.....

Name (typed)

Date.....

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