

Rattler bites girl



Hannah Boyd

ENVIRONMENT & HEALTH

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FREE PRESS SPECIAL

Hannah Boyd is on the mend after she was bitten by a massasauga rattlesnake at the end of July.

She is the second snakebite victim in less than a month to be treated at Huronia District Hospital (HDH). The young teen

was bitten July 31, while camping near Bala. She has since been readmitted to the local hospital for further treatment at least two more times.

The 13-year-old London girl who expected to spend the summer at her family's Georgian Bay cottage has instead spent several days in hospital recovering from a rattlesnake bite.

A Collingwood area man, Terry Dunlop was bitten behind his cot-

tage near Big Chute, on July 3.

Hannah Boyd was released from HDH, two weeks ago, she was readmitted on Wednesday night last week.

The girl was with a group of teens and cottage counsellors on an overnight canoe trip last week. They paddled for an hour to the Musquash River, which flows from Lake Muskoka to Go Home Lake, near Bala. They pitched tents and were preparing to turn

in for the night when Boyd was bitten on the leg by an eastern massasauga rattlesnake.

"I never saw it," said the Montessori student. "When it bit me, it felt like a needle going into you, but a couple of hours later it was painful and started to swell," she told the *London Free Press*.

Dunlop, this year's first victim also said he didn't see or hear anything prior to being bitten.

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Teen girl survives bite, still under treatment

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Boyd was taken by two counsellors out by canoe, in the dark and then driven to HDH. Doctors were waiting and monitored the swelling in Boyd's lower leg and took blood every 15 to 30 minutes to determine if her blood was thinning. At about 1:45 a.m. Thursday, August 1, doctors gave the eighth-grader Crofab, an anti-venom. She was discharged that evening.

But Friday morning, Thea Boyd found her daughter's leg twice as swollen as the night before. Thea called the hospital and, within a few hours, the teen had more blood tests.

That Friday's test results were normal, but Saturday's results showed Hannah's blood was dangerously thin. Two police boats were dispatched to the family's Honey Harbour cottage to take the teen to hospital.

In a recent *Midland Free Press* article, HDH said anti-venom is in short supply this year due to contamination of an existing supply and also because the product must now be ordered from Wales in Great Britain.

The hospital issued educational information on Massasauga Rattlers, which are an endangered species, to make people aware of where they can be found and what to do if bitten. The anti-venom is very expensive costing up to \$1,800 per vial and depending on the severity of the bite, a number of vials may be needed to treat one person.

According to hospital spokesperson Lorene Sibley, the hospital received a second shipment of anti-venom on Wednesday.

"Supplies were low due to the shortage, but the hospi-

tals had created a network for emergencies. We ordered another supply over a week ago and are now well stocked," said Sibley.

"The average for bites in the Midland area during a season is 1-3. People should watch and listen for the snakes when they are out walking and be aware of their environment, to prevent being bitten."

Parry Sound Hospital, the only other anti-venom supply location in this area has treated four Massasauga Rattle Snake bites in the past couple of weeks. The average number of bites for that area in a season is 4-7. The Massasauga Rattler habitat includes the Georgian Bay area from Tobermory to Parry Sound. The species are amphibious and can be found near water or in wooded areas, quite often sunning themselves on a walking path or rock.

While it is quite unusual for so many bites to take place within such a short period of time already this season, experts say it is not abnormal. Darlene Upton, chairperson of the Eastern Massasauga Rattle Snake Recovery Team on Georgian Bay Island says the number of bites that have occurred to this point are within the annual range of bites for in a poisonous snake habitat area.

"An estimated 0-9 bites per year has been set for this area and we are still well within that range," said Upton.

"It does seem a bit of fluke that so many happened at one time, but not abnormal. We are also in a very heavy tourist time and there are a lot more people around."

Upton agrees the best prevention is precaution. People walking in the woods or brushy areas where snakes may be, should wear thick pants and hiking boots to protect their feet. The snakes fangs are short and cannot penetrate thick coverings. The snakes are not known to strike people unless they are frightened. Do not pick them up, or play with them. A bite usually happens when a snake is stepped on or startled by someone stepping too near. People should be aware of their surroundings and watch for snakes. Most times the Massasauga will rattle its tail in warning.

Upton says because the snakes are active during the day and night, people should carry a flashlight when they are walking through the grass or wood. They need to be aware of their surroundings.

For more information about government web sites www.terra-plex.com/sin or www.massasauga.ca. Both sites provide details and educational information about the species and their habitat. Upton says another valuable resource is the Reptile Awareness Program, for which representatives will give educational presentations to cottage groups and other interested people. The web site is www.gbayerptiles.com.

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