

BC-Snake-Bites code:4; INDEX: Health, Environment; HL:Ontario injects funding to help treat poisonous rattlesnake bites

TORONTO (CP) - Ontario residents will have better access to antivenene after six people were bitten by a potentially deadly rattlesnake, the provincial government announced Thursday.

The Ministry of Health injected \$180,000 in one-time funding and another \$60,000 annually to help hospitals treat patients with rattlesnake bites.

“This funding will enable hospitals to provide the antivenene treatment needed in these emergency situations,” Health Minister Tony Clement said in a release.

This year, six people were bitten in the Georgian Bay area by the Massasauga rattlesnake, the only poisonous snake in Ontario. Since 1991, an average of two people have been bitten each year.

Although it's not known why there has been a jump in rattlesnake bites, Environment Canada said it could be because the snakes - or even people - are more active this summer or because there's been a jump in the reptile's population.

There are only four areas of habitat for the Massasauga, considered a threatened species in

Ontario, including areas of Georgian Bay, Windsor and Port Colborne.

The small, shy and slow-moving snake known to spend most of its life alone and in hiding grows up to a metre long and rattles its tail when it believes it's being attacked.

The funding will be available to 11 hospitals and the Toronto zoo. **First hit - Premier mot clé**