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Title:

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Date:

2016-02-01

Citation:

Ozaki, A., Tanimoto, T., Leppold, C., Tsubokura, M., Kato, S., Tsukada, M., Kami, M. & Ohira, H. (2016). A possible association between the resumption of agricultural activities and a venomous snakebite after fukushima nuclear crisis. Oxford Medical Case Reports, 2016 (2), pp.22-23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/omcr/omw002>.

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CLINICAL IMAGE

A possible association between the resumption of agricultural activities and a venomous snakebite after Fukushima nuclear crisis

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A 42-year-old male was brought to our hospital in Fukushima, Japan, due to a snakebite by a Mamushi (*Gloydius blomhoffii*) on his right index finger (Fig. 1). The bite occurred while he was cutting bushes in Iitate village, a mountainous area originally famous for agriculture but contaminated by radioactive agents following Fukushima nuclear crisis in 2011. Evacuation orders led to mass evacuation and abandonment of the village. However, in the past year, there has been a slow resumption of agricultural activities.

There may be an increased risk of venomous snakebites after natural disasters, due to infrastructural damage, as well as poor knowledge regarding possibly dangerous native fauna among local residents and emergency personnel [1]. Moreover, rapid environmental changes may contribute to the destruction and invasion of snake habitats, possibly increasing their encounters with humans [2]. On the other hand, after nuclear disasters, damage to infrastructure in surrounding areas is usually less than would occur after natural disasters [3]. Additionally, nuclear disasters can lead to evacuation of local residents [3, 4], lessening the chance of human–snake interactions. Therefore, immediate risk of snakebites after nuclear disasters may be lower than that after natural disasters. However, little is



Figure 1: Ecchymosis exists around the bite site at the distal interphalangeal joint of his right index finger, with swelling around his right hand and forearm.

known about long-term risk of snakebites after nuclear disasters.

The present venomous snakebite may be associated with the resumption of agriculture, 3 years after the disaster. Post-evacuation,

Received: November 21, 2015. Revised: January 5, 2016. Accepted: January 12, 2016

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Mamushi habitats may have expanded due to increased amounts of fallen debris on farming fields, where they prefer to live [5]. While a range of physiological, developmental, genetic, morphological and behavioral consequences of radiation exposure have been investigated in flora and fauna in Fukushima [6], there is little information on potential effects on reptiles, calling for further research. We should be aware of an increased risk of snakebites in previously abandoned areas of Fukushima, and other long-deserted post-disaster areas.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None declared.

FUNDING

None.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study was reviewed and approved by the Minamisoma Municipal General Hospital Institutional Review Board.

CONSENT

The study participant provided informed written consent prior to the submission.

GUARANTOR

A.O. is a guarantor of the study.

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