

Talking Points

A weekly section to spur conversation



SNAKES HAVE BITTEN THIS MAN HUNDREDS OF TIMES. HIS BLOOD COULD MAKE A BETTER TREATMENT

By Adithi Ramakrishnan | The Associated Press

Tim Friede has been bitten by snakes hundreds of times — often on purpose. Now scientists are studying his blood in hopes of creating a better treatment for snake bites.

Friede has long had a fascination with reptiles and other venomous creatures. He used to milk scorpions' and spiders' venom as a hobby and kept dozens of snakes at his Wisconsin home.

Hoping to protect himself from snake bites — and out of what he calls "simple curiosity" — he began injecting himself with small doses of snake venom and then slowly increased the amount to try to build up tolerance. He would then let snakes bite him.

"At first, it was very scary," Friede said. "But the more you do it, the better you get at it, the more calm you become with it."

While no doctor or emergency medical technician — or anyone, really — would ever suggest this is a remotely good idea, experts say his method tracks how the body works. When the immune system is exposed to the toxins in snake venom, it develops antibodies that can neutralize the poison. If it's a small amount of venom the body can react before it's overwhelmed. And if it's venom the body has seen before, it can react more quickly and handle larger exposures.

Friede has withstood snakebites and injections for nearly two decades and still has a refrigerator full of venom. In videos posted to his YouTube channel, he shows off swollen fang marks on his arms from black mamba, taipan and water cobra bites.

"I wanted to push the limits as close to death as possible to where I'm just basically teetering right there and then back off of it," he said.

But Friede also wanted to help. He emailed every scientist he could find, asking them to study the tolerance he'd built up.

And there is a need: Around 110,000 people die from snakebite every year, according to the World Health Organization. And making antivenom is expensive and difficult. It is often

created by injecting large mammals like horses with venom and collecting the antibodies they produce. These antivenoms are usually only effective against specific snake species, and can sometimes produce bad reactions due to their nonhuman origins.

When Columbia University's Peter Kwong heard of Friede, he said, "Oh, wow, this is very unusual. We had a very special individual with amazing antibodies that he created over 18 years."

In a study published Friday in the journal *Cell*, Kwong and collaborators shared what they were able to do with Friede's unique blood: They identified two antibodies that neutralize venom from many different snake species with the aim of someday producing a treatment that could offer broad protection.

It's very early research — the antivenom was only tested in mice, and researchers are still years away from human trials. And while their experimental treatment shows promise against the group of snakes that include mambas and cobras, it's not effective against vipers, which include snakes like rattlers.

"Despite the promise, there is much work to do," said Nicholas Casewell, a snakebite researcher at Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in an email. Casewell was not involved with the new study.

Friede's journey has not been without its missteps. Among them: He said after one bad snake bite he had to cut off part of his finger. And some particularly nasty cobra bites sent him to the hospital.

Friede is now employed by Centivax, a company trying to develop the treatment and that helped pay for the study. He's excited that his 18-year odyssey could one day save lives from snakebite, but his message to those inspired to follow in his footsteps is simple: "Don't do it," he said.



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NOTEWORTHY & INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE WHO'VE DIED THIS YEAR

By Bernard McGhee | The Associated Press

The month of April marked the passing of Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope. Known for his focus on the poor and his emphasis on humility, his death from a stroke brought leaders from across the globe to his funeral.

April also saw the death of Val Kilmer, celebrated for his roles in "Top Gun" and as Jim Morrison in "The Doors." His intense performances often led to a reputation for being a challenging actor.

Other notable deaths in April included basketball Hall of Famer Dick Barnett, "Dennis the Menace" star Jay North, former Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa, Blondie drummer Clem Burke, and football player Steve McMichael.

Here is a list of some influential figures who passed away in the first four months of this year (cause of death noted if available):

JANUARY

- + Wayne Osmond, 73. A founding member of the popular 1970s family band The Osmonds, known for hits like "One Bad Apple." Jan. 1.
- + David Lodge, 89. A respected British novelist and critic who satirized academia and life in works such as "Small World." Jan. 1.
- + Rosita Missoni, 93. The co-founder of the iconic Italian fashion house Missoni, famous for its colorful knitwear. Jan. 1.
- + Jean-Marie Le Pen, 96. The controversial founder of France's far-right National Front, known for his anti-immigration rhetoric. Jan. 7.
- + Peter Yarrow, 86. A member of the legendary folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary, known for their civil rights and anti-war anthems. Jan. 7.
- + Sam Moore, 89. The surviving member of the soul duo Sam & Dave, famous for hits like "Soul Man." Jan. 10.
- + David Lynch, 78. The acclaimed filmmaker known for his surreal and dark films like "Blue Velvet" and the TV series "Twin Peaks." Jan. 16.
- + Bob Uecker, 90. A former baseball player who became a beloved and humorous broadcaster and actor. Jan. 16.
- + Joan Plowright, 95. An award-winning British actress and the widow of Laurence Olivier, who significantly contributed to British theater. Jan. 16.
- + Cecilie Richards, 67. A prominent advocate for abortion access and women's rights, who led Planned Parenthood for 12 years. Jan. 20.

- + Garth Hudson, 87. The keyboardist for the influential rock group The Band, known for his unique musical contributions to songs like "The Weight." Jan. 21.
- + Dick Burton, 95. A highly accomplished and innovative figure skater and promoter of the sport. Jan. 30.
- + Marianne Faithfull, 78. A British singer and icon of the 1960s, who inspired and co-wrote Rolling Stones songs and had a notable solo career. Jan. 30.

FEBRUARY

- + Horst Köhler, 81. A former head of the International Monetary Fund who served as the President of Germany. Feb. 1.
- + The Aga Khan, 88. The spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims, known for his philanthropic work in developing countries. Feb. 4.
- + Tiger Woods' mother, Kultida Woods, 80. Credited with instilling a strong spirit in her famous golfer son. Feb. 4.
- + Irv Gotti, 54. The founder of Murder Inc. Records, a major force in hip-hop and R&B. Feb. 5.
- + Virginia McCaskey, 102. The longtime principal owner of the Chicago Bears football team. Feb. 6.
- + Tony Roberts, 85. A versatile actor known for his theater work and appearances in Woody Allen films. Feb. 7.
- + Sam Nujoma, 95. The first president of Namibia, who led the country to independence. Feb. 8.
- + Tom Robbins, 92. A celebrated novelist known for his quirky and philosophical books like "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues." Feb. 9.
- + Gene Hackman, 95. An Oscar-winning actor known for his diverse and powerful performances. Feb. 17.
- + Roberta Flack, 88. A Grammy-winning singer known for her soulful and intimate vocal style and hits like "Killing Me Softly." Feb. 24.
- + Boris Spassky, 88. A former world chess champion who famously lost his title to Bobby Fischer in 1972. Feb. 27.
- + David Johansen, 75. The lead singer of the influential glam and protopunk band the New York Dolls, who later performed as Buster Poindexter. Feb. 28.

MARCH

- + Angie Stone, 63. A Grammy-nominated R&B singer known for her powerful vocals and the hit "Wish I Didn't Miss You." March 1. Car crash.

- + Joey Molland, 77. A guitarist for the band Badfinger, known for their 1970s hits. March 1.
- + Carl Dean, 82. Dolly Parton's husband of nearly 60 years, who inspired her song "Jolene." March 3.
- + Oleg Gordievsky, 86. A high-ranking KGB officer who became a double agent for Britain, significantly impacting the Cold War. March 4.
- + Roy Ayers, 84. A legendary jazz vibraphonist known for his influential and sampled hit "Everybody Loves the Sunshine." March 4.
- + Junior Bridgeman, 71. A former NBA star who found great success as a businessman, including owning restaurant franchises and having a stake in the Milwaukee Bucks. March 11.
- + Ron Nessen, 90. The press secretary for President Gerald Ford, who aimed to restore credibility to the role. March 12.
- + Alan Simpson, 93. A former U.S. Senator known for his wit and ability to bridge partisan divides. March 14.
- + Nita Lowey, 87. A long-serving Democratic congresswoman from New York and the first woman to chair the House Appropriations Committee. March 15.
- + George Foreman, 76. A two-time heavyweight boxing champion who had a remarkable comeback in his 40s and became a successful entrepreneur. March 21.
- + Kitty Dukakis, 88. The wife of former Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, who openly discussed her struggles with depression and addiction. March 21.
- + David Childs, 83. The lead architect of One World Trade Center in New York City. March 26.
- + Richard Chamberlain, 90. A popular actor from the 1960s TV series "Dr. Kildare" who later became known as the "king of the miniseries." March 29.

APRIL

- + Val Kilmer, 65. The actor known for roles in "Top Gun," "Batman Forever," and "The Doors." April 1. Pneumonia.
- + Jay North, 73. The child actor who starred as Dennis in the TV show "Dennis the Menace." April 6.
- + Clem Burke, 70. The drummer for the iconic rock band Blondie. April 6. Cancer.
- + Mario Vargas Llosa, 89. A Nobel Prize-winning Peruvian author and a major figure in Latin American literature. April 13.
- + Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, 85. A former

- Prime Minister of Malaysia. April 14.
- + Wink Martindale, 91. The genial host of popular game shows like "Gambit" and "Tic-Tac-Dough." April 15.
- + Pope Francis, 88. The first Latin American pope, known for his humility and focus on the poor. April 21. Stroke.
- + Steve McMichael, 67. A star defensive tackle for the Chicago Bears' Super Bowl-winning team who later became a professional wrestler. April 23. ALS.
- + Dick Barnett, 88. A basketball Hall of Famer who played for the championship-winning New York Knicks. April 27.

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