



## HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

# Brazilian Snake Venom Could Help Fight COVID-19, Study Says

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Brazilian researchers have found a molecule in snake **venom** that could fight COVID-19. The discovery might be the first step toward a medication to fight the virus.

Scientists found that the molecule produced by the jararacussu snake prevented the virus' ability to spread in monkey cells by 75 percent. The study was published in the scientific publication *Molecules* this month.

Rafael Guido is a professor with the University of Sao Paulo and an author of the study. He said the molecule in the venom “was able to **inhibit** a very important **protein** from the virus.”

The molecule is called a peptide, or a group of **amino acids**. The molecule is able to connect to an enzyme of the coronavirus called PLPro without harming other cells. PLPro is an important part of how the virus reproduces.

The peptide is already known to scientists for its ability to fight bacteria. Guido said the peptide can be made in a laboratory, so jararacussu snakes do not need to be caught.

“We're **wary** about people going out to hunt the jararacussu around Brazil, thinking they're going to save the world,” said zoologist Giuseppe Puerto with the Butantan Institute in Sao Paulo. “It's not the venom itself that will cure the coronavirus,” he added.

The jararacussu is one of the largest snakes in Brazil, and can be up to 2 meters long. It lives in Brazil's Atlantic Forest and is also found in Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina.

Researchers will test different amounts of the molecule and see if it is able to prevent the virus from entering cells at all.

They hope to test the molecule in human cells one day, but there are currently no plans to start.

I'm Dan Novak.

*Leonardo Benassatto reported this story for Reuters. Dan Novak adapted it for VOA Learning English. Susan Shand was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**venom** — *n.* poison that is produced by an animal (such as a snake) and used to kill or injure another animal usually through biting or stinging

**inhibit** — *v.* to keep (someone) from doing what he or she wants to do

**protein** — *n.* a substance found in foods (such as meat, milk, eggs, and beans) that is an important part of the human diet

**amino acid** — *n.* any one of many acids that occur naturally in living things and that include some which form proteins

**wary** — *adj.* not having or showing complete trust in someone or something that could be dangerous or cause trouble