



MEMBER ALERT SNAKE SAFETY

Snakebites are rare, but may happen. Always bring a venom vacuum extractor when traveling in snake habitats, and know how to use it.

Avoid the known habitats of poisonous snakes, such as rocky ledges and woodpiles.

Watch Where You Step. When underground, or when on your way to a cave, always keep alert and be sure of where you are stepping. Your principal danger outside is snakes; inside it is probably loose rock and holes.

Rattlesnakes are typically described as poisonous, but they are actually venomous.

A poisonous snake is one that is harmful to touch or eat.

A venomous snake injects dangerous venom into its victim.

A bite from a rattlesnake can be extremely dangerous, but rattlesnakes should not be characterized as aggressive and vicious, striking and biting without provocation, as they are often shown. If rattlesnakes are given some space and enough time to escape to a safe place, they will usually just crawl away as fast as possible to avoid confrontation. Rattlesnakes will not strike without a reason: they will strike at a potential meal and they will defend themselves from anything they perceive as dangerous. They avoid striking and biting because it uses up their valuable supply of venom which they need to kill and digest their food.

Rattlesnakes are often portrayed with the body partly coiled, the tail rattling loudly, and the head raised up and ready to strike, but they do not need to coil up this way to strike and bite. This display is a warning not to come any closer. It's a defensive behavior that some rattlesnakes use when they sense that crawling away would put them in danger of attack.

Rattlesnakes do not always rattle a warning. Sometimes they rattle loudly to warn potential enemies of their presence, but other times they remain silent when they sense a threat, choosing to remain still to rely on their cryptic color and pattern to let them blend into their surroundings to hide from the threat. Making a noise in this situation risks advertising their presence. They also use their natural camouflage to hunt by sitting still, without rattling, trying to remain invisible as they wait for a warm-blooded prey animal to pass close enough to strike.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention page about venomous snakes (accessed 4/23/2015) "It has been estimated that 7,000–8,000 people per year receive venomous bites in the United States, and about 5 of those people die."

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 2014 shown in an article on the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County web site titled "Misplaced Fears: Rattlesnakes Are Not as Dangerous as Ladders, Trees, Dogs, or Large TVs" (accessed 7/16/21) falling from ladders, mammal bites, falling from trees, stings from venomous hornets wasps and bees, dog bites, lightning strikes, venomous spiders, and fireworks all kill more people every year than venomous snakes, and that includes all of the venomous snakes found in all of the

U.S.A., not just rattlesnakes. Of course, this statistic does not address the thousands of people who have suffered physically (and financially) as the result of a venomous snake bite.

A 1988 USC Medical Center study (L.A. Times "Rattling the Snakebite Victim" January 23, 1988) resulted in a profile of the average American snakebite victim. It found that 44% of snakebites were accidental, more than half resulted from the victim handling a snake, 28% of the victims were intoxicated, and 90% of the victims were male, most of whom were in their 20s. Many of the victims were trying to feed captive snakes. This profile of the typical American snakebite victim as an intoxicated young man who is handling a snake may not be entirely accurate, considering that it only dealt with snakebite victims taken to one southern California hospital, and it does not consider any other part of the country or any other venomous snake other than rattlesnakes, but it has become a standard profile that is frequently cited. I suspect that many of the snakebite victims who were feeding the snakes were experienced snake handlers who were not intoxicated, but just accidentally did something careless.

Most snakebites can be avoided if you leave the snake alone – do not try to catch, kill, handle, or otherwise provoke a rattlesnake into acting in self-defense and strike at you. And always watch where you are walking and where you put your hands when you are in areas where rattlesnakes are present because any motion within their striking range might trigger them to strike, either to defend themselves or because that's how they catch their food.

What Can be Done to Prevent a Bite?

- Hands, feet, and ankles are the most common sites for rattlesnake bites. Using some common-sense rules can prevent most snake bites.
- Never go barefooted or wear sandals when walking in the rough. Always wear hiking boots.
- Always stay on paths. Avoid tall grass, weeds and heavy underbrush where there may be snakes.
- Use a walking stick when hiking. If you come across a snake, it can strike the stick instead of you.
- Always look for concealed snakes before picking up rocks, sticks or firewood.
- Always check carefully around stumps or logs before sitting.
- When climbing, always look before putting your hands in a new location. Snakes can climb walls, trees and rocks and are frequently found at high altitudes.
- Never grab "sticks" or "branches" while swimming. Rattlesnakes are excellent swimmers.
- Baby rattlesnakes are poisonous! They can and do bite. Leave them alone.
- Never hike alone. Always have a buddy to help in case of an emergency. Learn basic life-saving methods.
- DO NOT handle fresh killed snakes. You may still be bitten.
- Never tease a snake to see how far it can strike. You can be several feet from the snake and still be within striking distance.
- DO NOT keep rattlesnakes as pets. The majority of rattlesnake bites occur when people (usually intoxicated young men in their 20s) tease or play with their "pet" rattlesnake.
- Teach children to respect snakes and to leave snakes alone. Curious children who pick up snakes are frequently bitten.
- Always give snakes the right of way!

Rattlesnake bite symptoms

- Bleeding
- Bruising
- Collapse
- Difficulty breathing
- Drooling
- Extreme pain
- Lightheadedness
- Nausea
- Shock, in rare cases
- Swelling at the location of the bite

What Should I Do for Initial First Aid?

Because most Californians live in rattlesnake country, a snakebite emergency plan should be developed before it is needed. If you are less than one hour from the nearest emergency room, initial treatment is relatively simple:

- **Call 911** or get to the nearest emergency room or transport victim to the nearest emergency facility for further treatment.
- Phone ahead to notify the emergency facility that a snakebite victim is being brought in.
- Try to calm the victim.
- Gently wash the area with soap and water.
- Apply a cold, wet cloth over the bite.
- If safe to do so, have someone photograph the snake so that identification can be made to aid in treatment.

What should NOT be done after a rattlesnake bite?

Several DO NOT's are very important to remember:

DO NOT apply a tourniquet.

DO NOT pack the bite area in ice.

DO NOT cut the wound with a knife or razor.

DO NOT use your mouth to suck out the venom.

DO NOT let the victim drink alcohol.

DO NOT apply electric shock.

DO NOT use a snakebite kit as these do not work and can cause more damage.

Call: 1-800-222-1222

any time, any place in California

[California Poison Control System](#)