

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY

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SNAKES



Southern California has several native venomous species of rattlesnakes: the Western Diamondback, Sidewinder, Speckled rattlesnake, Red Diamond rattlesnake, Southern Pacific, Great Basin rattlesnake and the Mojave rattlesnake. The Western Diamondback is most commonly involved in bites and is really venomous. Rattlesnakes are different than non-poisonous snakes in that they have a thin neck and a well-defined triangular or arrow-shaped head instead of having the head, neck and body about the same diameter. Their eyes are hooded and the pupils of the eyes are oval (like a cat) instead of round. All snake bites, regardless if it is from a rattlesnake or a non-poisonous snake require medical attention in an emergency room.

Symptoms of a Rattlesnake Bite

- Rattlesnakes may bite without injecting venom, called a "dry bite," but the painful bite can still get infected
- If a rattlesnake injects venom into the wound, a variety of symptoms develop: swelling, pain, bleeding at the site, nausea, vomiting, sweating, chills, dizziness, weakness, numbness or tingling of the mouth or tongue, changes in the heart rate and blood pressure, excessive salivation, thirst, swollen eyelids, blurred vision, muscle spasms, and unconsciousness
- Some bites may prevent the ability of the blood to clot properly, and others (from the Mojave rattlesnake) can affect the nervous system and can lead to paralysis

Preventing a Bite

- Never walk barefoot or wear sandals in uneven areas - always wear boots
- Stay on paths - avoid tall grass, weeds and heavy underbrush
- Look for hidden snakes before picking up rocks, sticks and other objects
- Check carefully around rocks, stumps, logs and grass before sitting
- Stay away from baby rattlesnakes - they can bite and are also poisonous
- Don't handle fresh killed snakes - they can still bite
- Never tease a snake to see how far it can strike - they can strike from several feet
- Never hike alone - always have a buddy to help in case of an emergency
- Always give snakes the right of way!

Responding to a Rattlesnake Bite

- If you are less than one hour from an emergency room: try to calm the victim, wash the area gently with soap and water, apply a cold/ wet cloth over the bite and call 9-1-1
- DO NOT: apply a tourniquet, pack the bite area in ice, cut the wound with a knife or razor, use your mouth to suck out the venom, let the victim drink alcohol, or apply electric shock (this will NOT help the victim and is dangerous)