

Snake Safety



Generally not aggressive, rattlesnakes strike when threatened or deliberately provoked, but given room they will retreat. Most snake bites occur when a rattlesnake is handled or accidentally touched by someone walking or climbing. The majority of snakebites occur on the hands, feet and ankles.

Rattlesnakes usually avoid humans, but about 8,000 people are bitten by venomous snakes in the United States each year, with 10 to 15 deaths, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The most common venomous snake in Idaho is the Western Rattlesnake. Other nonvenomous snakes of Idaho include the Rubber Boa, Racer, Ringneck Snake, Night Snake, Striped Whipsnake, Common Garter Snake, Gopher Snake, Ground Snake, and Longnose Snake.

Species Distribution

Oregon:

- Western Rattlesnake (or Northern Pacific Rattlesnake)
- Great Basin Rattlesnake

Montana:

- Western Rattlesnake (or Prairie Rattlesnake)

Wyoming:

- Western Rattlesnake (or Prairie Rattlesnake)
- Midget Faded Rattlesnake

Precautions

Most bites occur between the months of April and October when snakes and humans are most active outdoors. About 25 percent of the bites are “dry,” meaning no venom was injected, but the bites still require medical treatment. Depending on weather and threatening conditions such as wildfires; rattlesnakes may roam at any time of the day or night. If walking at night, be sure to use a flashlight.

To avoid rattlesnake bites some safety precautions will help:

- Wear appropriate over-the-ankle hiking boots, thick socks, and loose-fitting long pants. Never go barefoot or wear sandals when walking through wild areas.
- When hiking, stick to well-used trails if all possible.
- Avoid tall grass, weeds and heavy underbrush where snakes may hide during the day.
- Look at your feet to watch where you step and do not put your foot in or near a crevice where you cannot see.
- Do not step or put your hands where you cannot see, and avoid wandering around in the dark.
- If a fallen tree or large rock is in your path, step up on to it instead of over it, as there might be a snake on the other side.
- Be especially careful when climbing rocks or gathering firewood.
- Check out stumps or logs before sitting down, and shake out sleeping bags before use.
- Do not turn over rocks or logs. If you must move a rock or log, use gloves and roll it toward you, giving anything beneath it the opportunity to escape in the opposite direction.
- Never grab “sticks” or “branches” while swimming in lakes and rivers. Rattlesnakes can swim.

- Avoid approaching any snake you cannot positively identify as a safe species.
- If you hear the warning rattle, move away from the area and do not make sudden or threatening movements in the direction of the snake.
- Remember rattlesnakes do not always rattle before they strike!
- Do not handle a freshly killed snake - it can still inject venom.

First Aid

DON'T

If bitten by a rattlesnake **DO NOT**:

- Do not make incisions over the bite wound.
- Do not restrict blood flow by applying a tourniquet.
- Do not ice the wound.
- Do not suck the poison out with your mouth.

These methods can very well cause additional harm and most amputations or other serious results of a rattlesnake bite are a result of icing or applying a tourniquet.

DO

- Stay calm
- Call Dispatch via radio or 911
- Wash the bite area gently with soap and water if available
- Remove watches, rings, etc., which may constrict swelling
- Immobilize the affected area
- Keep the bite below the heart if possible
- Transport safely to the nearest medical facility immediately.

Frenetic, high-speed driving places the victim at greater risk of an accident and increased heart rate. If the doctor is more than 30 minutes away, keep the bite below the heart, and then try to get to the medical facility as quickly as possible.

Most modern over-the-counter snakebite kits consist of a suction device for drawing out venom from the bite wound. This can be helpful in the interim of getting to a hospital or poison center if a kit is handy. Using your mouth is not advisable as the poison can enter the bloodstream through cuts or sores and might be swallowed.

Rattlesnake serum (antivenin) is made from antibodies extracted from horse blood. The serum has its own side effects as the body will have an allergic reaction. However, it's the most effective treatment available. Rattlesnake bites are rarely fatal with less than 1 in 600 resulting in death, and approximately 33 percent not containing injection of venom at all. However, you should assume for your own sake that venom has been introduced and always seek treatment.

Snake Facts

- There are over 2700 different Breeds of Snakes in the world.
- Less than one-third of the 2,700 species of snakes are classified as poisonous and fewer than 300 species of snakes may be fatal to humans. In fact, more than twice as many people in the United States are killed annually by bees, wasps, and scorpions than by snakes.
- Snakes are one of the most persecuted animals in the world.
- In the United States, there are over 25 different species of Rattlesnakes.
- Snakes are one of the only animals in the United States that helps control the US rodent population.