

Animals – Snakes Safety Fact Sheet

Snakes are commonly encountered in the field. Although rarely fatal, venomous snakes are responsible for 7,000-8,000 bites per year in North America. Common venomous snakes in North America include rattlesnakes, copperheads, water moccasins (cottonmouths), and coral snakes. Even non-venomous snakes can be hazardous, as bites can lead to infection. If you are going to an international location, there will be additional species that may be more venomous. Signs and symptoms associated with a bite may vary by species, but may include:

- **Bleeding/discharge around bite**
- **Redness/swelling/blistering Severe pain around the bite**
- **Weakness**
- **Dizziness**
- **Rapid heart rate**
- **Nausea and vomiting**
- **Labored breathing**
- **Disturbed vision**
- **Increased salivation or sweating**
- **Numbness around face and/or limbs**

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- ✓Sturdy boots
- ✓Long pants
- ✓Snake-proof gaiters
- ✓Leather gloves

PREPARATION AND TRAINING

- ✓Research the potential species you may encounter in your field area. You should be able to identify a snake if you were to come across one in the field.
- ✓It is recommended you take courses in: Wilderness First Aid

GENERAL SAFETY

- ❖ If you are hiking, disturb the brush ahead of you with a stick before walking through.
- ❖ Avoid areas that are attractive to snakes (e.g., rock piles, under bushes).
- ❖ Do not put your hand into any place you cannot see.
- ❖ Turn over rocks or other objects with a stick, not your hands, as there may be a snake underneath.
- ❖ Do not approach or handle any snake, even if it appears to be dead.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- ❖ If you are bitten, keep the wounded area immobilized, below the heart.
- ❖ Do not tourniquet the area or make any incisions. These methods have been shown to be ineffective and can cause more tissue damage.
- ❖ Do not try to suck out the venom, especially by mouth. Snakebite kits that have a suction device should also not be used as studies have shown that these do not remove venom and can cause more tissue damage.
- ❖ Do not apply ice or cold packs to the bite.
- ❖ Do not give a snakebite victim anything to eat or drink.
- ❖ Keep calm; this can slow the spread of venom.
- ❖ Get medical attention immediately. Do not wait for symptoms to appear.
- ❖ If possible, identify the species, or photograph the snake, to assist medical providers. Do not attempt to capture the snake.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [Venomous Snakes](#)