

# Snake Bite Safety and Prevention Tips

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If you frequently hike or otherwise enjoy the great outdoors with your pet, please take care to prevent painful encounters with snakes. Bites occur most often in between March and October when snakes are most active. According to veterinarians, toxicologists, and the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (APCC), a snake bite is always considered an emergency—a venomous snake bite can be fatal if not treated immediately, and even a bite from a non-venomous snake can be dangerous for your pets.

Florida is home to six kinds of **venomous snakes**. There are two types of venomous snakes in Florida. The Crotalidae, or pit vipers, and the Elapidae. Included in the family of pit vipers are the Diamondback Rattlesnake, Canebrake Rattlesnake, Pigmy Rattlesnake, Cottonmouth (or Water Moccasin), and the Copperhead. The venom of these snakes is hemotoxic, that is, it destroys the red blood cells and the walls of the blood vessels of the victim. The Elapidae, represented in Florida by the Coral Snake, have neurotoxic venom. This attacks the nervous system of a victim, bringing on paralysis.

## The APCC Veterinarians offer the following tips for snake bite safety around pets:

### Avoid chance encounters with snakes:

- Keep your yard tidy by clearing away undergrowth, toys and tools that make great hiding places for snakes.
- Keep walkways clear of brush, flowers and shrubs.
- Clean up any spilled food, fruit or bird seed, which can attract rodents—and therefore snakes—to your yard.
- When walking your pet, keep him on a leash.
- Steer your pet clear of long grasses, bushes and rocks.
- Snakes can strike across a distance equal to about half their body length. If you see a snake, head back the way you came.
- Familiarize yourself with snake species common in your area, or where you are visiting. In the event of a bite, identifying the type of snake will help with your pet's treatment. Different antivenins are given for different snake species bites.

### Recognize snake bite symptoms:

- Local or general swelling
- Bleeding
- Intense pain
- Low blood pressure
- Dead tissue around the wound
- Shortness of breath
- Weakness
- Renal failure

### What to do if you think your pet's been bitten:



- Remember to stay calm.
- Keep your pet calm, too, by limiting his activity.
- If your pet was bitten on the neck, remove his collar.
- If possible, keep the location of the bite below heart level.
- Seek veterinary care for your pet immediately.
- Skip home treatment options such as cold packs, ice, tourniquets, alcohol, bleeding the wound and trying to suck out venom- these should not be attempted in place of getting your pet to the vet— they may just waste precious time.
- Always keep your personal safety in mind and do not try to catch or kill a snake yourself.
- Even if you think a snake is dead, never handle him. Some dead snakes are capable of inflicting a bite by muscle contractions.



Timber or Canebrake Rattlesnake



Diamondback Rattlesnake



Pygmy Rattlesnake



Water Moccasin or Cottonmouth





Coral Snake (red touches yellow)

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