

What To Do If A Person Is Bitten By A Rattlesnake

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The goal for treatment: Safe and rapid transport to a hospital for evaluation

- Find a place where the patient can lie flat and rest comfortably. Encourage the patient to remain calm and offer reassurance. Activity and anxiety can increase the absorption of the venom.
- Keep patient hydrated and consider protecting the patient from the elements (sun, cold, rain).
- Call 911 via cell phone or text. **Important: Be prepared to provide your location.** If cell phone or texting is unavailable, send a small team where connectivity is available, then call 911. Do not leave the patient alone in order to get help.
- Gently cleanse and disinfect the bite area with antiseptic soap and water.
- Apply a sterile dressing. Secure the dressing with a clean bandage.
- Remove all rings, watches, jewelry and tight-fitting clothing as the bite area (and most of the bitten appendage) will swell.
- Try to keep the bite location even with the heart. Raising it above the heart will increase the spread of venom into the body and swelling will increase if kept below heart level.
- If you need to relocate the patient, walking is acceptable if the patient feels up to it and no other good alternative is available.

What Not To Do

- Do not assume that a bite is not serious or that treatment can be delayed.
- Do not apply any suction to the bite. Such action has the potential to introduce harmful bacteria into the wound that could cause sepsis.
- Do not make any sort of incision into or around the bite marks. This will only increase trauma to the bite location.
- Do not apply a narrow, constrictive tourniquet such as a belt, shoelace, or cord. Restricting blood flow in this manner puts the bitten extremity at a high risk for amputation.
- Do not engage in strenuous physical activity. This will only speed the spread of venom to vital organs.
- Do not apply ice, hot or cold packs to the bite. These have no proven beneficial effects and may compound tissue damage through burns or frostbite.
- Do not allow the patient to take aspirin or use any medication.
- Do not give the patient anything to eat or drink unless approved by a physician.
- Do not remove dressing until antivenom is available.
- Do not waste time or take any additional risks attempting to kill or capture the offending snake.

What To Do (and not do) If Your Dog Is Bitten By A Rattlesnake

- Move a safe distance away from the snake and calm the dog.
- Clean the wound with soap and water and treat with antibiotic ointment if available.
- A venom extractor should not be used because the dog's hair will prevent a good seal from forming.
- Limit physical exertion and get the animal to veterinary care immediately, calling ahead if possible.

What To Do If You Encounter A Rattlesnake

- Snakes are often heard before they are seen. If you hear a rattlesnake, freeze in place until you or a companion can locate the animal. Attempting to move away from a snake you can't see may lead you closer to it.
- Even if the snake can be seen, not moving will reduce the threat you pose to the snake and help you calmly assess the situation.
- Once you assess the situation, establish a safe distance. Rattlesnakes can strike to a distance of half their body length. A good rule of thumb is to put at least 5 feet between yourself and the snake.
- Move by slowly backing the way you came. Move around the rattlesnake at a safe distance.
- Do not under any circumstances try and catch, kill, provoke or move a rattlesnake. Fully one-third of people who suffer snakebites were bitten as a result of trying to handle or kill the snake.

How To Avoid Getting A Rattlesnake Bite

- Wear sturdy leather boots, which afford good protection for the feet and ankles which are usually in the closest proximity to rattlesnakes and account for nearly all bites.
- Watch where you place feet and hands at all times, especially around logs and rocks where rattlesnakes shelter.
- Do not recreate with headphones or ear buds as a rattlesnake usually first warn if you are too close by making a rattle sound.
- Be especially aware of rattlesnakes around dusk when snakes become more active and are less visible.
- If the snake coils up and rattles, you are too close and should move away slowly. Stepping back just a few feet can be enough to convince the snake that you are not a threat. Most rattlesnakes will not strike at people unless they feel threatened or are deliberately provoked.