

First Aid Recommendations

There are many myths about what to do if someone is bitten by a snake. Unfortunately, some actions taken to treat the snake bite may make the situation worse instead of better.

DO:

- Sit down and stay calm.
- Gently wash the area with warm, soapy water.
- Remove any jewelry or tight clothing near the bite site.
- Keep the bitten area still, if possible, and raise it to heart level.
- Call NC Poison Control: **1-800-222-1222***

**If bitten by a rattlesnake, you will need to be evaluated in a hospital.*

DO NOT:

- Cut the bitten area to try and drain the venom. This can worsen the injury.
- Ice the area. Icing causes additional tissue damage.
- Make and apply a tourniquet or any tight bandage. It's better for the venom to flow through the body than for it to stay in one area.
- Use suction to remove the venom.
- Attempt to catch or kill the snake.

If a snakebite victim is having chest pain, difficulty breathing, face swelling, or has lost consciousness, call 9-1-1 immediately.

How NC Poison Control Can Help

You might be surprised to know that NC Poison Control helps people bitten by snakes. The center takes over 500 calls a year from the public and healthcare providers who need help managing snake bites. The nurses, pharmacists, and doctors who handle calls and chats at poison control deal with poisonings every day. Since a snake bite is a kind of poisoning, the NC Poison Control staff is uniquely qualified to handle snake bites. During peak snakebite season, NC Poison Control averages 2 to 3 calls a day about snake bites.

Anyone can call NC Poison Control with questions or for treatment advice related to a snake bite or any other poisoning, even if it's only a question. You can reach NC Poison Control by calling **1-800-222-1222**.

Additional Resources

www.HerpsOfNC.org/Snakes

www.NCPoisonControl.org

Dorcas, Michael E. *A Guide to the Snakes of North Carolina*. Charlotte, NC. 2004.

Juckett Gregory and John G. Hancox. *Venomous Snakebites in the United States: Management Review and Update*. Am Family Physician. 2002. Apr 1;65(7): 1367-1375.



The Venomous Snakes Of North Carolina

Presented by North Carolina Poison Control



Copperhead
(Agkistrodon contortrix)

Characteristics	dark brown, hourglass-shaped pattern
Typical adult length	2-3 feet
Habitat	everywhere
Defenses	camouflaging, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting

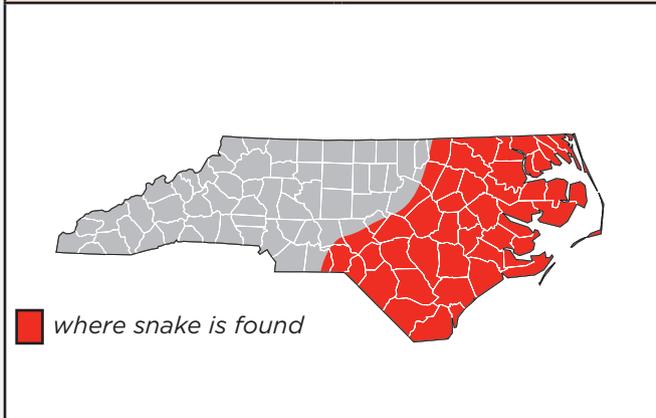
Copperhead bites are the most common venomous snake bite in NC. NC Poison Control receives 10 times the number of calls about copperhead bites than all other snakes combined. Copperhead bites can be severe but generally not as bad as other NC snakes.



Cottonmouth
(Agkistrodon piscivorus)

Characteristics	dark bands on dark or olive skin, white inside of mouth (Young cottonmouths are lighter and look similar to copperheads.)
Typical adult length	3 feet
Habitat	prefers fresh water but can also be found on land
Defenses	camouflaging, fleeing, opening the mouth widely, flattening the body to appear bigger, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting

Bite severity is about the same as the copperhead.



Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake
(Crotalus adamanteus)

Characteristics	dark diamond pattern outlined in black on gray or yellowish skin, rattle
Typical adult length	4-5 feet
Habitat	sandy, coastal areas
Defenses	camouflaging, fleeing, rattling their tail (sometimes)

Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than copperheads and are a medical emergency.





Pigmy Rattlesnake
(Sistrurus miliarius)

Characteristics	dark spotted pattern on gray, pinkish or red skin, rattle
Typical adult length	1-2 feet
Habitat	forest
Defenses	camouflaging, rattling their tail (sometimes) which sounds like a buzz

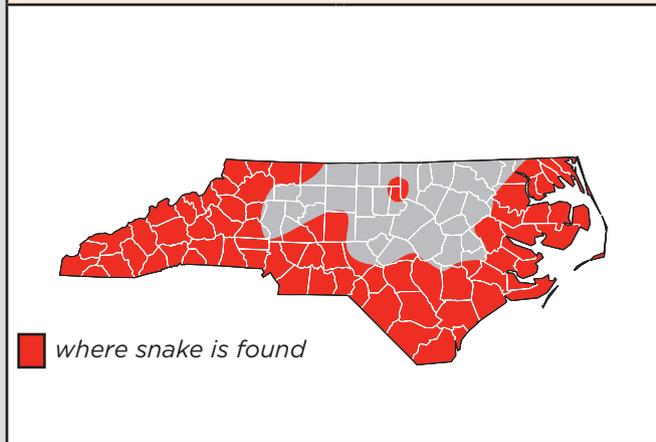
Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than copperheads and are a medical emergency.



Timber/Canebrake Rattlesnake
(Crotalus horridus)

Characteristics	varies in color: dark bands or chevrons on a lighter skin, rattle (Coastal varieties have a brown or orange "racing stripe" down the middle of the back.)
Typical adult length	4 feet
Habitat	forests
Defenses	camouflaging, rattling their tail (sometimes)

Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than copperheads and are a medical emergency.



Some venomous and non-venomous snakes look alike. While a snake's natural features can help determine if it has venom, it's safest to consider all snakes as potentially dangerous. NC Poison Control doesn't recommend getting within 5 feet of any snake.

Common Non-venomous Snakes



Adult Rat Snake

Eastern Milksnake



Brown Snake

Eastern Garter Snake



Eastern Kingsnake

Banded Watersnake

Some snakes may be in different color shades than shown in these pictures.

North Carolina is home to 37 different kinds of snakes, but only a few have venom. By nature, snakes are defensive and don't want to bite humans, but some will bite if they feel threatened.

This chart can help explain the difference between venomous and non-venomous snakes in North Carolina. It's safest to consider all snakes as potentially dangerous, though. NC Poison Control doesn't recommend getting close enough to a snake to identify it.

There are five venomous snakes in North Carolina that cause reported snakebite poisonings to NC Poison Control: copperhead, cottonmouth, eastern diamondback rattlesnake, pigmy rattlesnake and timber rattlesnake.

This brochure will not address the coral snake as NC Poison Control has not had a reported coral snake bite in over two decades.

Snakes with Venom (venomous)



Timber Rattlesnake

- Diamond or triangle-shaped head
- Elliptical or "cat-like" pupils
- Long fangs that can be folded against the roof of the mouth
- Pits that sense heat located below the eyes
- May have a rattle

Snakes without Venom (non-venomous)



Brown Snake

- Smooth head that is similar in shape to the body
- Round pupils
- No fangs but small teeth instead
- No pits

How to Prevent a Snake Bite

Coming across a snake can be startling, but snakes only bite humans when defending themselves. Snakes in North Carolina are most active from April through October.

Here are some tips to help you avoid a snake bite:

1. Watch your step, and watch where your hands go. Don't reach where you can't see, and don't step over an object without knowing what is on the other side.
2. Wear sturdy boots or shoes when you're outside, especially when gardening or hiking.
3. Wear gloves when gardening.
4. Use a flashlight at night when you're outside, even when you know the area well.
5. Back away slowly if you see a snake. **Don't try to pick it up or kill it.** It can bite you while you're trying to grab it. A dead snake, or even the detached head of a snake, can still bite because of the bite reflex.

If a snake must be moved, contact a wildlife removal specialist immediately.

Common Reactions to Venomous Snake Bites

The seriousness of a snake bite depends on several things like the type and size of snake, the amount of venom released, and the size and overall health of the person bitten. A venomous snake bite causes one or more puncture wounds that occasionally ooze blood. About half of all copperhead bites result in only mild swelling and pain.

Examples of snake bites



Most venomous snake bites result in ...

- pain
- bruising
- swelling
- nausea
- tissue damage

More concerning bites can cause ...

- weakness
- numbness
- tingling
- increased pulse rate
- vomiting
- confusion

Bites can also cause severe symptoms such as ...

- low blood pressure
- bleeding
- breathing problems