

How can I tell which snakes have venom and which don't?

Some of a snake's natural features can help determine if it has venom or not. However, it's safest to consider ALL snakes as potentially dangerous. The Carolinas Poison Center doesn't recommend getting within five feet of any snake.

For more information about snake identification, visit www.herpsofnc.org.

timber rattlesnake

brown snake



Snakes with Venom (venomous)	Snakes without Venom (non-venomous)
diamond or triangle shaped head	smooth head that is shaped like the body
elliptical or "cat-like" pupils	round pupils
long fangs that can be folded at the roof of the mouth	no fangs; small teeth instead
pits that sense heat located below the eyes	no pits
may have a rattle	



Copperhead

Agkistrodon contortrix

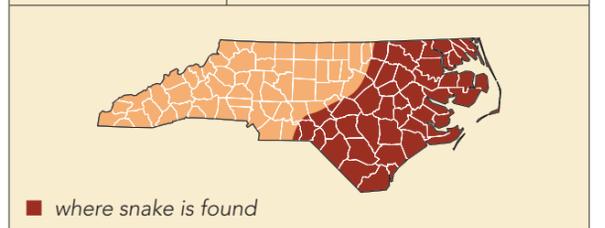
Characteristics	dark brown, hour-glass shaped pattern Young copperheads have yellow or green tails.
Typical adult length	2-3 feet
Habitat	everywhere
Defenses	camouflaging, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting
Bite severity	Copperhead bites can be severe but generally not as bad as other North Carolina snakes. About half of all copperhead bites result in only mild swelling and pain.



Cottonmouth

Agkistrodon piscivorus

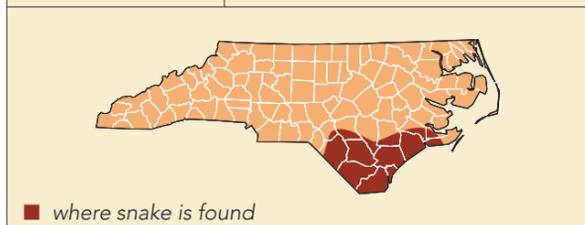
Characteristics	dark bands on dark or olive skin, white inside of mouth Young cottonmouths are lighter and look similar to copperheads.
Typical adult length	3 feet
Habitat	prefers freshwater but can also be found on land
Defenses	camouflaging, fleeing, opening the mouth widely, flattening the body to appear bigger, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting
Bite severity	Cottonmouth bites have about the same level of severity as copperhead bites.



Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake

Crotalus adamanteus

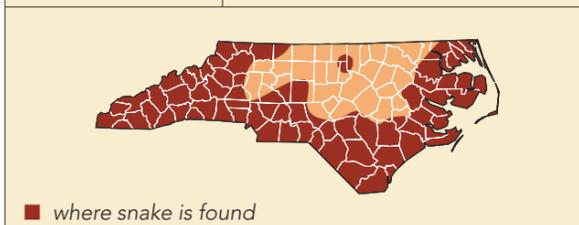
Characteristics	dark diamond pattern outlined in black on gray or yellowish skin, rattle
Typical adult length	4-5 feet
Habitat	sandy, coastal areas
Defenses	camouflaging, fleeing, rattling their tail (sometimes)
Bite severity	Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.



Timber Rattlesnake also known as a Canebrake

Crotalus horridus

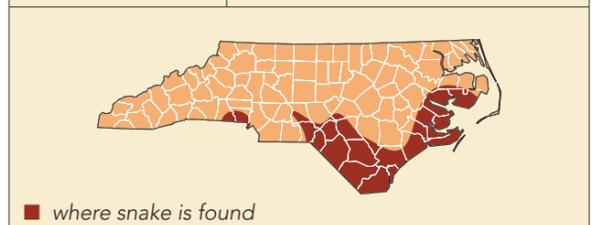
Characteristics	rattle, varies in color, dark bands on a lighter skin Coastal varieties have a brown or orange "racing stripe" down the middle of the back.
Typical adult length	4 feet
Habitat	forests
Defenses	camouflaging, rattling their tail (sometimes)
Bite severity	Bites from timber rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from 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	forests
Defenses	camouflaging, rattling their tail (sometimes), which sounds like a buzz
Bite severity	Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.



The Poisonous Snakes of North Carolina



eastern diamondback rattlesnake

Introduction to the Poisonous Snakes in North Carolina

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. Snakes in our state are most active from April through October.

This brochure will tell you more about the five poisonous snakes in North Carolina that cause people to call the Carolinas Poison Center for help:

- copperhead
- cottonmouth
- eastern diamondback rattlesnake
- pigmy rattlesnake
- timber rattlesnake

Copperheads are the most common poisonous snake in North Carolina. Carolinas Poison Center receives 10 times the number of calls about copperhead bites than all other snakes bites combined.

This brochure will not address the coral snake as the Carolinas Poison Center has not had a reported coral snake bite in about two decades.

What can happen when someone has been bitten by a snake with venom?

Snakes with venom will leave one or two puncture wounds when they bite. The place that is bitten may or may not ooze blood.

If you are bitten by a snake with venom, you will likely feel pain, bruising, swelling and maybe nausea.

The seriousness of a snake bite depends on a few things like the type of snake, the amount of venom released and the health of the person bitten.

More serious symptoms include:

- weakness
- increased heart rate
- confusion
- trouble breathing
- numbness
- vomiting
- low blood pressure

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



EXAMPLES OF SNAKE BITES



How the Poison Center Can Help

Carolinas Poison Center is the poison control center serving all of North Carolina. Since the venom from snakes is poisonous, the poison centers' nurses, pharmacists and doctors are uniquely qualified to handle calls about snake bites.

You might be surprised to know that Carolinas Poison Center takes **over 500 calls each year about snakes** – that's two to three calls a day during peak snakebite season.

Often, doctors and nurses at healthcare facilities call the poison center for advice on how to treat snake-bitten patients. Anyone can call the poison center with questions or for treatment advice related to a snake bite or any other poisoning.

You can reach Carolinas Poison Center by calling **1-800-222-1222**. Program the number into your phone for quick access.

Snake pictures and maps courtesy of Davidson College Herpetology Lab

Carolinas Poison Center would like to credit the following resource for aiding in the content development of this brochure: Dorcas, Michael E. A Guide to the Snakes of North Carolina. Charlotte, NC, 2004

www.NCPoisonCenter.org • www.herpsofnc.org

Carolinas HealthCare System



cottonmouth snake

Preventing a Snake Bite

Coming across a snake can be startling, but remember, snakes only bite humans when defending themselves.

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. Use a flashlight at night when you're outside, even when you know the area well.
4. 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 a snake's detached head, can still bite because of its bite reflex.

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

First Aid Recommendations

You've probably heard some advice about what to do if bitten by a snake. Unfortunately, not all steps people take to treat a snake bite make the situation better.

If bitten...

DO:

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

DO NOT:

- Cut the bitten area to try to drain the venom. This can worsen the injury.
- Try to remove the venom by either sucking it out or using a suction device.
- Ice the area. Icing causes additional tissue damage.
- 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.
- Attempt to catch or kill the snake.

The exact snake species is not needed to provide treatment.