

Summer Time is Snake Season

Snakes are a lot like people in one way: they stay put when the weather is hot. When the sun goes down, they get out and move around. That is when man and serpent often meet. You don't have to be paranoid about the fear of being bitten by a snake. But you do have to be careful. In fact, more people die from wasp or bee stings than snakebites. According to the US Food and Drug Administration, venomous snakes bite about 8,000 people each year. Nationwide, only 9 to 15 people die from the snakebite.

The following are some facts about the dangers of snakes and safety tips to take to prevent being bitten.

How many species of venomous snakes live in North Carolina?

Six: copperhead, cottonmouth, timber rattlesnake, pigmy rattlesnake, eastern diamondback rattlesnake and eastern coral snake. There are also 31 non-venomous species in North Carolina, for a total of 37 species.

- Copperhead
- Cottonmouth
- Timber rattlesnake
- Pigmy rattlesnake
- Eastern diamondback rattlesnake
- Eastern coral snake

Which is the most dangerous?

Although the eastern coral snake possesses very powerful venom, it is rare in the state and no bites have been recorded. The eastern diamondback rattlesnake has a large quantity of venom that is more toxic than that of the timber rattlesnake, pigmy rattlesnake, cottonmouth or copperhead. However, it, too, is quite rare.

The copperhead can be considered the most dangerous in North Carolina simply because in many areas of the state, it is the only venomous snake you are likely to encounter. The copperhead is more likely to occur near human dwellings than other venomous species, and it is responsible for the vast majority of venomous snakebites.

Can a copperhead bite be fatal?

Fortunately, copperhead venom is relatively mild. The bites are painful, but deaths from copperhead bite are extremely rare. When proper medical assistance is received, the bite normally causes no permanent injury. Medical assistance should always be sought for any venomous snakebite.

What is a pit viper? Do any live in North Carolina?

Five of North Carolina's six venomous species are pit vipers. The distinguishing feature is the heat-sensing pit, or indentation, between the eye and nostril on each side of the head. The pits face forward and are used to detect differences in temperature. The snakes' "binocular" heat-sensing ability allows them to detect in total darkness the location and probably the size of warm-blooded animals. This faculty is primarily used to acquire food-just as snake venom is. However, it also can help snakes detect the presence of animals that might prey upon or otherwise harm them.

All pit vipers have vertical elliptical pupils, and most of the scales under the tail are in a single row, although these characteristics can be difficult to observe.

The eastern coral snake is the one venomous species in North Carolina that isn't a pit viper. It has many characteristics in common with the 31 non-venomous snakes, which have round pupils, no pit and a double row of scales under the tail.

How can I avoid snakes?

You can reduce the likelihood of their presence near your residence by removing items they might use for shelter - or which their prey might use -- such as scrap sheet metal, boards, woodpiles and similar debris. Raising materials off the ground promotes dryer storage and attracts fewer critters. When woodlands and other plant communities are nearby, eliminating the possibility of a snake is virtually impossible. Learn to identify the dangerous species in your area, and be cautious when conducting activities that could promote encounters

(e.g., don't walk around barefooted outdoors at night when the copperhead is on the prowl for food).

What is the correct way to deal with snakebite?

Follow directions given by the Carolinas Poison Center:

- Stay calm. Call 911 or Carolinas Poison Center at 1-800-848-6946.
- Try to identify the snake by sight only. Look for color, markings and head shape.
- Do not try to kill the snake; it could bite again.
- Keep the patient calm and immobile (preferably lying down).
- Keep the affected limb at an even level with the rest of the body.
- Do not use a tourniquet.
- Do not cut the wound.
- Do not try to suck out the venom.
- Do not pack the wound in ice.

Where in North Carolina are snakes found?

More species of snakes occur in the Coastal Plain (36) than in the Piedmont (29) or the mountains (21). In most habitats, non-venomous snakes far outnumber venomous snakes in both number of species and number of individuals.