

Reptiles



A Fact Sheet prepared by National Telecommunications Safety Panel



Rattlesnake



Water Moccasin



Copperhead

SNAKES

There are approximately 45,000 snakebite incidents that occur each year in the United States. Venomous or poisonous snakebites account for 20% of the total.

The mortality is low, but there is a high incident of crippling injuries to the extremities when bitten by pit vipers.

Pit vipers have a pit between the eyes and the nostril on each side of the head, elliptical pupils and usually two well-developed fangs. The venom of these snakes affects the circulatory system.

Another poisonous snake is the coral snake. The coral snake is small, with round pupils and red, yellow and black rings around the body, always with a black nose. Their venom affects the nervous system.

Nonpoisonous snakes have round pupils, divided scales on the underside of the tail and no pits.

All reactions from snakebites are aggravated by acute fear and anxiety.

There are several preventive measures in reducing the chance of snakebites.

- Do not disturb snakes
- If it is necessary to enter a snake infested area, wear protective clothing such as boots, long trousers and mid-forearm gloves
- Try to give advance warning of your presence by rustling the ground with a stick
- Never try to surprise or corner a snake
- Do not reach blindly into holes or rocky ledges
- Avoid snakes you cannot identify

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Precautions that may prove helpful are:

- Knowing where medical help may be located and how to reach it
- Keeping the snakebite area immobile

The objectives of first aid for snakebite victims are:

- To reduce the circulation of the blood through the bite area
- To delay absorption of venom
- To prevent aggravation of the local wound and to sustain respiration

In certain tropical climates, such as Florida, people have released exotic pets that have established a population in the wild. An example is the Burmese python. The python's bite is painful, but normally not lethal. However, if wrapped around you they could strangle your respiratory system or pull you under water and drown you.

Reptiles, continued



NILE MONITOR LIZARD

Another example of an exotic “pet” released is the Nile Monitor Lizard. These animals can become quite large, up to 7 feet in length. They are carnivorous, sharp-toothed invasive reptiles. They are very strong and if trapped will attack. Their bite is painful and filled with bacteria which can cause serious infections.

If you see a large lizard of any type you should stay away from it.

Should you be bitten or slashed by a large lizard you need to seek immediate medical treatment.

Most of the smaller hand size or smaller lizards are simply a nuisance and are not harmful.



ALLIGATORS

Like all the other reptiles listed you need to give the alligator a wide berth, and stay away from it. Normally, making a lot of noise while in their habitat will scare them away, unless it is a female guarding a nest. If the gator does not leave, then you should. Seek professional assistance from a local game Wildlife Agent if you MUST work around the gator. Do NOT try to move the gator on your own.

Alligators near human habitation are often seen crossing roads, entering suburbs and finding shelter in swimming pools during the drier months. This is a particularly dangerous time to be around a gator.

Alligator Habitat

Alligators live primarily in freshwater swamps and marshes, but also in rivers, lakes and smaller bodies of water. They can tolerate a reasonable degree of salinity for short periods of time, being occasionally found in brackish water around mangrove swamps. Construction of burrows is well documented in this species. Even outside their burrows, they can tolerate limited periods of freezing conditions.

REFERENCES

“First Aid for Snakebites”, American Red Cross Pamphlet