

# Avoiding Snakebites

Snakes are generally secretive and non-aggressive, so preventing snakebites requires only common sense actions.

Recognize snake habitat: brushy, wooded, overgrown or rocky areas create protective cover where snakes can hide and where they seek their prey. When in these areas, look carefully before putting your feet down or placing your hand near any hiding spot.

Wear leather ankle-high boots when walking in potential snake habitats and when working in these environments, wear leather work gloves.

If you do see a snake, simply move slowly away from it.

Teach children to respect snakes and to NEVER try to touch, pet or pick up ANY wild animal.

Do not capture or keep wild snakes or any other wild animals as pets.



The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries publishes an excellent booklet with color photographs of all of Virginia's native snake species, and information on their habitats and distribution. You can contact them at (804) 367-1000 to request a copy of this informative booklet.

# Non-Venomous Snakes



Eastern Milksnake



Red Cornsnake



Eastern Kingsnake



Mole Kingsnake



Northern Watersnake



Common Rainbow Snake

Northern Red-Bellied Snake



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# Virginia's Snakes and Snake Bites



1-800-222-1222

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Virginia is home to thirty-two different species of snakes. Most are beneficial to people and to the environment because their diet includes pests such as rodents and insects. Countless snakes are needlessly killed every year because they are considered “poisonous” and dangerous, when in fact, most are harmless. All of the following are in the *Crotalidae* pit viper “family”: they have a heat sensing pit located between the eye and nostril.

The most commonly encountered venomous snake statewide is the **Copperhead**.



The **Cottonmouth** (or water moccasin), always lives near water and is mostly in the southeastern region of Virginia.



The **Timber rattlesnake (L)** is found in the western, mountainous regions of the state whereas the **Canebrake rattlesnake (R)** (a Virginia endangered species), lives near the Dismal Swamp and southeastern corner of Virginia.



## Facts about Virginia Snakes

Few creatures are as hated and feared as the snake. Learning facts about these animals may help to develop a more realistic view of the relatively low risk they pose to humans.

**1** Snake bites are not a significant cause of death in the United States.

**2** Not every bite from a venomous snake will result in the release of venom. Nearly 25% of bites are “dry”.

**3** The venom of a young snake is identical to that of the adult snake, so a bite from a baby snake can be just as dangerous as from a fully-grown snake.

**4** It is NOT necessary to capture or kill a snake that has bitten someone. The same antivenom is used to treat a serious bite from any of Virginia’s venomous snakes.

**5** The easiest way to recognize a venomous snake is by noticing the shape of the pupil or head. Pit vipers have elliptical-shaped pupils like a cat and a triangular head.



Non-venomous snakes will have a round pupil and oval shaped head.



## Symptoms

Snakebites may cause the following symptoms in the body part that was bitten:

- ◆ Immediate pain which worsens with time
- ◆ Steadily increasing swelling, which can often involve the entire bitten limb
- ◆ The skin around the bite site may become pale or dusky or even look like a bruise
- ◆ There may or may not be bleeding from the bite punctures
- ◆ Sometimes, a victim will experience a metallic taste, nausea, faintness, sweating and tingling of the lips

## First Aid

- ◆ Keep the victim calm and at rest
- ◆ Remove tight clothing and jewelry such as rings, bracelets in the limb bitten
- ◆ Position the limb at heart level or slightly elevated
- ◆ Do NOT apply tourniquets
- ◆ Do NOT apply ice
- ◆ Do NOT attempt to cut the skin or suck the venom out
- ◆ Seek medical evaluation if symptoms are noted and

Call the Virginia Poison Center ASAP:

**1-800-222-1222**