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.

### Snakes with Venom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Typical Adult Length</th>
<th>Habitat</th>
<th>Defenses</th>
<th>Bite Severity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake</td>
<td>dark diamond pattern outlined in black on gray or yellowish skin, rattle</td>
<td>4-5 feet</td>
<td>sandy, coastal areas</td>
<td>camouflaging, fleeing, rattling their tail (sometimes)</td>
<td>Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber Rattlesnake</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>4 feet</td>
<td>forests</td>
<td>camouflaging, rattling their tail (sometimes)</td>
<td>Bites from timber rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copperhead</td>
<td>dark brown, hour-glass shaped pattern Young copperheads have yellow or green tails</td>
<td>2-3 feet</td>
<td>everywhere</td>
<td>camouflaging, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottonmouth</td>
<td>dark bands on dark or olive skin, white inside of mouth Young cottonmouths are lighter and look similar to copperheads.</td>
<td>3 feet</td>
<td>prefers freshwater but can also be found on land</td>
<td>camouflaging, fleeing, opening the mouth widely, flattening the body to appear bigger, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting</td>
<td>Cottonmouth bites have about the same level of severity as copperhead bites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Snakes without Venom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Characteristics</th>
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<th>Bite Severity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timber Rattlesnake</td>
<td>smooth head that is shaped like the body elliptical or “cat-like” pupils long fangs that can be folded at the roof of the mouth</td>
<td></td>
<td>forests</td>
<td>round pupils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copperhead</td>
<td>no fangs; small teeth instead pits that sense heat located below the eyes may have a rattle</td>
<td></td>
<td>everywhere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Additional Information

- **Cottonmouth**
  - **Characteristics**: dark bands on dark or olive skin, white inside of mouth
  - **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.

- **Timber Rattlesnake**
  - **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.
  - **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**
  - **Characteristics**: dark spotted pattern on gray, pinkish or red skin, rattle
  - **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.

- **Diamond or Triangle Shaped Head**
  - **Characteristics**: smooth head that is shaped like the body

- **Elliptical or “Cat-Like” Pupils**
  - **Characteristics**: round pupils

- **Long Fangs that Can Be Folded at the Roof of the Mouth**
  - **Characteristics**: no fangs; small teeth instead

- **Pits That Sense Heat Located Below the Eyes**
  - **Characteristics**: no pits

- **May Have a Rattle**
  - **Characteristics**: may have a rattle

- **Copperhead**
  - **Characteristics**: dark brown, hour-glass shaped pattern Young copperheads have yellow or green tails
  - **Habitat**: everywhere
  - **Defenses**: camouflaging, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting
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Preventing a Snake Bite

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.

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...

1. Stay still. Never move the person who was bitten unless you’re in immediate danger of being attacked.
2. Do not apply ice to the wound, but instead apply gentle pressure to stop the bleeding.
3. Do not give the victim anything to eat or drink.
4. Call 9-1-1 immediately.

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.

Venomous vs. Non-Venomous / Poisonous NC Snakes

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.

The Poisonous Snakes of North Carolina

www.NCPoisonCenter.org  •  www.herpsofnc.org

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