

As Warm Temperatures Come Up, So Do Snakes!

Recent rains have provided snakes the opportunity to mate a little longer. Generally, rattlesnakes emerge from hibernation into April, or when the average daytime temperatures reach and remain about 60 degrees Fahrenheit and higher.

Rattlesnakes are not confined to rural areas. They have been found in urban areas, in lakesides, parks, and at golf courses. There are several safety measures that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of startling a rattlesnake.

The Dos and Don'ts in Snake Country

Be alert. Like all reptiles, rattlesnakes are sensitive to the ambient temperature and will adjust their behavior accordingly. After a cold or cool night, they will attempt to raise their body temperature by basking in the sun midmorning. To prevent overheating during hot days of spring and summer, they will become more active at dawn, dusk or night.

- Wear sturdy boots and loose-fitting long pants. Never go barefoot or wear sandals when walking through brushy, wild areas. Startled rattlesnakes may not rattle before striking defensively.
- Children should not wear flip-flops while playing outdoors in snake country.
- When hiking, stick to well-used trails. Avoid tall grass, weeds and heavy underbrush where snakes may hide during the day.
- Do not step or put your hands where you cannot see. Step on logs and rocks, never over them, and be especially careful when climbing rocks or gathering firewood. Check out stumps or logs before sitting down, and shake out sleeping bags before use.
- Never grab "sticks" or "branches" while swimming in lakes and rivers. Rattlesnakes can swim.
- Be careful when stepping over doorsteps as well. Snakes like to crawl along the edge of buildings where they are protected on one side.
- Never hike alone. Always have someone with you who can assist in an emergency.
- Do not handle a freshly killed snake, as it can still inject venom.
- Teach children early to respect snakes and to leave them alone.
- Leash your dog when hiking in snake country. Dogs are at increased risk of being bitten due to holding their nose to the ground while investigating the outdoors. Speak to your veterinarian about canine rattlesnake vaccines and what to do if your pet is bitten.

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The best protection against rattlesnakes in the yard is a "rattlesnake proof" fence. The fence should either be solid or with mesh no larger than one-quarter inch. It should be at least three feet high with the bottom buried a few inches in the ground.

What to Do About a Bite

Though uncommon, rattlesnake bites do occur, so have a plan in place for responding to any situation. Carry a cell phone, hike with a companion who can assist in an emergency and make sure that family or friends know where you are going and when you will be checking in. In the event of a bite:

Stay calm but act quickly. Remove watches, rings, etc., which may constrict swelling. Call 911 or transport the victim to the nearest medical facility.

What you should NOT do after a rattlesnake bite

- DON'T apply a tourniquet.
- DON'T use your mouth to suck out the venom.
- DON'T pack the bite area in ice.
- DON'T let the victim drink alcohol.
- DON'T cut the wound with a knife or razor.

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