



Snakes

Snakes are found in many parts of California and may pose a hazard for those who work outdoors. Although snakes generally avoid humans or animals, they can attack, particularly if they're surprised or are protecting their young or territory. Some snakes are considered "harmless," but others release a poisonous venom when they bite. If you'll be working or walking where snakes are found, be aware of their habits, dress for protection, and know what to do or not to do if you encounter or are bitten by a snake.

Poisonous snakes commonly found in California include coral snakes and pit vipers: rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths (water moccasins). A bite from one of these snakes should always be considered a medical emergency. Although deaths from snakebites are relatively rare, people who are bitten can't always positively identify the snake, so should get prompt medical care. Even a bite from a so-called "harmless" snake can cause an infection or allergic reaction in some people.

The key to avoiding snakebites is understanding their habits and staying alert. Snake seasons are spring, summer, and early fall. They're usually found where food (rodents), water, and protection are available such as abandoned structures, irrigation ditches, water holes, and in rock piles. They like places that offer both a place to sun and a place to hide. At night when it's cool, snakes become active hunting their prey.

If you'll be working or walking in snake infested areas, wear protective clothing such as long pants, leather boots, and gloves. Be aware of your surroundings. Be cautious in tall grass and watch where you step. Walk in areas where the ground is clear so you can see where you step. Watch where you put your hands. Don't reach blindly into rock cracks, wood piles, animal burrows or under bushes. And when you sit, look first, especially in shady areas.

Most snakebites happen when a snake is accidentally stepped on, handled or harassed. Many people are bitten because they try to get a closer look or try to kill it. So, leave snakes alone! If you encounter a snake, stay calm and freeze in place. The snake will often move away. If it doesn't move then you should slowly walk around it, keeping as far away as possible. Usually snakes are

not aggressive and will not “chase” a person. They'd rather escape from noise and commotion or remain quiet and hidden.

The symptoms of a poisonous snake bite vary depending on the snake's size and species, the amount of poison in its venom, the bite's location, and the victim's age and underlying medical problems. Specific treatment for a snake bite should be left to the emergency medical personnel. Most medical professionals recommend against incisions in the wound, tourniquets, ice or any other type of cooling on the bite and against electric shock. However, if someone is bitten, the American Red Cross suggests a few basic first-aid steps:

- Keep the victim calm and still.
- Have the victim lie down, with the affected limb immobilized and placed lower than the heart.
- Remove rings, bracelets, boots or other restricting items from the bitten extremity.
- Get medical care. Responding quickly is crucial.

Use common sense when you're in areas where there may be snakes. Keep in mind that an unprovoked snake doesn't want trouble any more than you do. Caution and respect are your best weapons against snake bites.