

IRVINE POLICE DEPARTMENT

IRVINE POLICE DEPARTMENT • ONE CIVIC CENTER PLAZA
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CALIFORNIA NATIVE SNAKE INFORMATION

California has a variety of snakes, most of which are benign. The exception is California's only native venomous snake - the rattlesnake.

California rattlesnake species include the northern Pacific rattlesnake (in northern California), and the Western Diamondback, Sidewinder, Speckled rattlesnake, Red Diamond rattlesnake, Southern Pacific, Great Basin rattlesnake and the Mojave rattlesnake (all found in Southern California). Though rattlesnakes are dangerous if provoked, they also provide humans with a tremendous service! They eat rodents, other reptiles, and insects, and are in turn eaten by other predators.

Generally not aggressive, rattlesnakes strike when threatened or deliberately provoked, but given room they will retreat. Most snake bites occur when a rattlesnake is handled or accidentally touched by someone walking or climbing. The majority of snakebites occur on the hands, feet and ankles.

Rattlesnakes can cause serious injury to humans on rare occasions. The California Poison Control Center notes that rattlesnakes account for more than 800 bites each year with one to two deaths. Most bites occur between the months of April and October when snakes and humans are most active outdoors. About 25 percent of the bites are "dry," meaning no venom was injected, but the bites still require medical treatment.

Rattlesnakes are not confined to rural areas alone. They have been found near urban areas, in river or lakeside parks, and at golf courses. Be aware that startled rattlesnakes may not rattle before striking defensively. There are several safety measures that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of startling a rattlesnake.

- Never go barefoot or wear sandals when walking through wild areas. Wear hiking boots.
- When hiking, stick to well-used trails (dogs too) and wear over-the-ankle boots and loose-fitting long pants. 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, and avoid wandering around in the dark. 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.
- Be careful when stepping over the doorstep as well. Snakes like to crawl along the edge of buildings where they are protected on one side.
- Do not handle a freshly killed snake, it can still inject venom.
- Keep a close eye on all pets, their curiosity can get them into trouble and by the time you realize they have been bit it can be too late.

Is it a rattlesnake?



Venomous

Exception: Brown watersnake



Nonvenomous

Exception: Coralsnake

Many non-threatening snakes have suffered a quick death from a frantic human who has mistakenly identified a gopher snake, garter, racer or other as a rattlesnake. This usually happens when a snake assumes an instinctual defensive position used to bluff adversaries. A gopher snake has the added unfortunate trait of imitating a rattlesnake by flattening its head and body, vibrating its tail, hissing and actually striking if approached too closely.

A rattlesnake is a heavy-bodied, blunt-tailed snake with one or more rattles on the tail. It has a triangular-shaped head, much broader at the back than at the front, and a distinct “neck” region. The rattlesnake also has openings between the nostrils and eyes, which is a heat-sensing pit. The eyes are hooded with elliptical pupils. Also note that rattles may not always be present, as they are often lost through breakage and are not always developed on the young.

Encouraging and protecting natural competitors like gopher snakes, kingsnakes and racers will reduce the rattlesnake population in the immediate area. And, kingsnakes actually kill and eat rattlesnakes.

What to do in the event of a snake 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.

The first thing to do if bitten is to stay calm. Generally, the most serious effect of a rattlesnake bite to an adult is local tissue damage which needs to be treated. Children and pets, because they are smaller, are in greater danger if bitten.

The California Poison Control Center advises:

- Stay calm
- Wash the bite area gently with soap and water
- Remove watches, rings, etc, which may constrict swelling
- Immobilize the affected area
- Transport safely to the nearest medical facility.



If you have a snake in your yard and would prefer to have it removed, call Irvine Animal Services at 949-724-7092 or Irvine Police Dispatch at 949-724-7200

-Some information on this flyer provided by California Department of Fish and Game