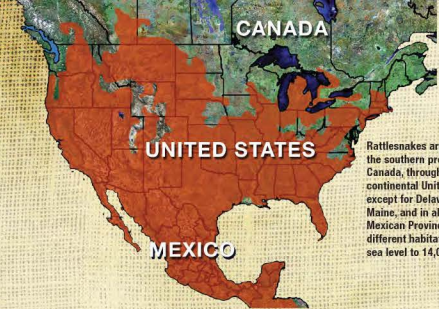


DISTRIBUTION & APPEARANCE

NORTH AMERICAN RATTLESNAKES



Rattlesnakes are found in the southern provinces of Canada, throughout the continental United States, except for Delaware and Maine, and in all of the Mexican Provinces in different habitats from sea level to 14,000 feet.

BEHAVIOR & HABITATS

Rattlesnakes can be encountered in many types of terrain including coastal sand dunes, forests, savanna, deserts, as well as rocky hills and mountainsides



- ◆ Sit-and-wait predators during the day; remain coiled next to a regularly used animal path, and wait silently for prey to come within striking distance
- ◆ Active hunters at night and during rainy, overcast days; most active on calm warm nights
- ◆ Tail rattle is shaken vigorously to warn off intruders
- ◆ Some species are relatively docile while others are quite aggressive when approached
- ◆ Common in areas with abundant rodents; often found near farms and towns
- ◆ During the winter months, rattlesnakes hibernate in groups in rocky outcroppings, tree stumps or animal burrows



Sit-and-wait predators during the day, stalkers by night Coil up and rattle their tails to warn off intruders High rodent populations attract rattlesnakes Rattlesnakes use caves, crevices, old animal burrows to escape from heat and cold

VENOM & EFFECTS



Venom delivered through hollow front fangs



Rattlesnake bite wound

- ◆ Rattlesnakes use their venom to capture and digest their prey.
- ◆ Venom is delivered through long, hollow fangs at the front of the mouth.
- ◆ Large rattlesnake species are especially dangerous. They can strike about 1/3 to 1/2 their body length, inflict deep puncture wounds, and inject large amounts of venom.
- ◆ It is possible to be bitten by a rattlesnake and not be poisoned, since the snake does not always inject venom. When a rattlesnake injects venom, pain is usually immediate.
- ◆ Rattlesnake venom is a complex mixture of compounds that destroy blood cells and muscle tissues and prevent wounds from healing.
- ◆ Snakebite victims may experience nausea, a fall in blood pressure, weakness, rapid pulse, shortness of breath, vomiting, and kidney failure.
- ◆ There may be severe swelling, blistering, bleeding and discoloration at the bite site.
- ◆ Destruction of skin, cartilage, and muscle tissue can occur around the bite site.
- ◆ Death from internal bleeding, muscle paralysis or shock can result from a severe bite left untreated.
- ◆ Antivenins are available to treat the symptoms of the venoms of North American rattlesnakes.



Initial effects (swelling) of rattlesnake venom



Tissue damage from rattlesnake venom

FIRST AID

- ◆ Stay calm.
- ◆ Move victim and onlookers away from the snake.
- ◆ Help the victim lie down. Reassure and calm the victim.
- ◆ Remove constricting items such as jewelry, watches, rings, or shoes.
- ◆ Immobilize the injured part of the body and place in a comfortable position.
- ◆ Record the appearance and progress of the symptoms.
- ◆ Take the victim to the nearest medical facility as soon as possible.
- ◆ Retain snake for identification. Kill it without destroying the head.

Rattlesnake bites cannot be treated in the field. Do not waste valuable time trying. Medical facilities have the expertise to maintain stable body functions and have antivenins. Therefore, no one need die or suffer permanent injury from a rattlesnake bite.

PREVENTION

- ◆ Assume that any snake you encounter is venomous. Leave snakes alone. Many people are bitten because they try to kill a snake or get a closer look at it.
- ◆ As tactical situations permit, avoid high risk snake habitats. Locate bivouacs away from piles of brush, rocks, or other debris.
- ◆ Get rid of things that attract snakes. Remove woodpiles, rock piles, construction debris, dumps, dense undergrowth, and similar shelter for snakes. Store supplies elevated off the ground. Practice good sanitation. Control rodents.
- ◆ Practice "SNAKE-SMART" behavior. Shake out bedding and clothes before use. Sleep off the ground, if possible. Wear thick leather boots for the best foot protection. Avoid walking alone. Keep to clear paths.
- ◆ Be alert in areas where snakes may be hiding or sunning. Don't reach or place parts of your body into places you cannot see into directly, especially in high grass or among rocks. Keep hands off of rock ledges. Never sit on or step over large rocks or logs without first checking to see what is on the other side.
- ◆ When walking on paved roadways at night, use a flashlight and avoid walking along shoulders or medians.
- ◆ In the unit compound, keep doors, windows, and vents closed whenever possible. Block holes in foundations, crawl spaces, ceilings and roofs.
- ◆ Do not pick up a "dead" snake; it may only be injured, stunned or playing dead. Even a recently killed snake can bite through reflex action. Use a stick, a bag, or other container, and do not handle the head when transporting a dead snake that needs to be identified.

IDENTIFICATION

All of the rattlesnakes found in North America are pit vipers. They are divided between two genera, *Crotalus* and *Sistrurus*, based on the size of the head scales between the eyes. Different species vary widely in adult size: some reach barely 2 feet in length while others can grow to 8 feet.



Long, hinged fangs that tuck into roof of mouth when not in use



Genus *Crotalus*, note broad triangular head with small scales between eyes



Jointed rattle at tip of tail



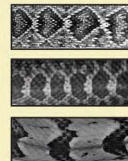
Vertically elliptical eye pupil; heat sensing pit between eye and nostril



Genus *Sistrurus*, smaller head with large scales between eyes



Anal plate single; single scales under tail



Ridged (keeled) scales covering the body, with patterns in the shape of diamonds, ovals, or stripes along the back

