



RAMONA MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT
In cooperation with the
**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY and FIRE
PROTECTION**

105 Earlham Street Telephones:
Ramona, California 92065-1599
1-760-788-2244

RAMONA FIRE PREVENTION BUREAU

2009 Safety Press Release

Diamondback Rattlesnake Safety

The recent warm days in the Ramona area is a sure sign that summer is at our doorstep. There may be a few other things at our doorstep.

The warm weather has awakened our snake community and as they explore their surroundings, the local human population's concerns for safety have started the 2009 "snake sightings"

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

Should you come in close encounter with a snake, do not panic, back away. Should you feel trapped or threatened by the snake, call 911 and explain the situation and ask for help. Stay in a safe location until help arrives.



When the temperature begins to warm, usually between March and May, snakes come out of hibernation. Their young are usually born between August and October. The young rattlesnake is dangerous from birth. As they are unable to make a rattling sound, the youngsters throw themselves into a defensive pose and strike repeatedly when disturbed. The rattlesnake eats lizards and small rodents. Their only prey is prey they can swallow whole; therefore, they will not intentionally hunt and strike a large animal (including humans) unless they feel threatened.

They are members of a larger family of poisonous snakes called pit vipers. Pit vipers have heat-sensitive pits on the sides of their heads that help them detect warm-blooded prey. The defining characteristic of the rattlesnake is its rattle that produces a buzzing sound with shaking. Each time the rattlesnake sheds its skin (1-4 times a year); a new segment is added at the base of the rattle. In Southern California, we have both the Pacific and the Western Diamondback Rattlesnakes



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Rattlesnakes can cause serious injury to humans - on rare occasions even death, as was evidenced when a rattlesnake bite killed a Riverside County man. 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.

Approximately 8,000 people annually are treated for poisonous snake bites in the United States. However, the California Poison Control Center notes that rattlesnakes only account for about 800 of those bites each year with about one to two deaths. California rattlesnake species include the northern Pacific rattlesnake in northern California and in Southern California the Western Diamondback, Sidewinder, Speckled rattlesnake, Red Diamond rattlesnake, Southern Pacific, Great Basin rattlesnake and the Mojave rattlesnake.

The potential of running into a rattlesnake should not deter anyone from venturing outdoors, but there are several precautions that can be taken to lessen the chance of being bitten when out in snake country - which is just about anywhere in California. Rattlesnakes live from sea level to the inland prairies and desert areas.

The Dos and Don'ts in Snake Country

When hiking, stick to well-used trails and wear over-the-ankle boots and loose-fitting long pants. 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. Always avoid walking through dense brush or willow thickets.

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.

Is It A Rattlesnake or Isn't It?

Many a useful and nonthreatening snake has suffered a quick death from a frantic human who has mistakenly identified a gopher snake, 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.

Keeping Snakes Out Of the Yard

The best protection against rattlesnakes in the yard is a "rattlesnake proof" fence. It can be expensive and require maintenance, however. The fence should either be solid or with mesh no larger than 1/4 inch. It should be at least three feet high with the bottom buried a few inches in the ground. Slanting your snake fence outward about a 30-degree angle will help. Vegetation should be kept away from the fence since the snake could crawl to the top of an adjacent tree or shrub. Discourage snakes by removing piles of boards or rocks around the home. Use caution when removing those piles - there may already be a snake there. Encouraging and protecting natural competitors like gopher snakes, king snakes and racers will reduce the rattlesnake population in the immediate area. And, king snakes actually kill and eat rattlesnakes.



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What to Do In The Event Of a Snake Bite

Though uncommon, rattlesnake bites do occur. 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, because they are smaller, are in more danger if they are bitten.

Call 911 immediately. Professional medical assistance is a priority. But should you be unable to reach 911 or are away from EMS service, get to a doctor as soon as possible, but stay calm. Frenetic, high-speed driving places the victim at greater risk of an accident and increased heart rate. If the doctor is more than 30 minutes away, elevate the bite and then try to get to the doctor as quickly as possible.

How to avoid Snakes:

- Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Walk or hike in areas where the ground is clear, so you can see where you step or reach with your hands. Avoid specific snake habitats like brush piles, debris mounds, logjams, root systems, and abandoned buildings. They reside anywhere small rodents may survive. Know that most snakes try to avoid human contact, but they will stand their ground if they feel threatened.
- Dress appropriately. When you are hiking, wear protective clothing, such as heavy long pants and high boots. Wear gloves when using your hands to move rocks or brush.
- When a snake is spotted, leave it alone! So many bite victims have chosen to hit the snake or try to catch it.
- Learn more about snakes. Become familiar of the snakes indigenous to our area.
- Learn basic snakebite first aid. Learn the symptoms and care of the rattlesnake bite. Seek immediate medical attention!
- Teach your children not to play/disturb any snakes they encounter.
- Show your children pictures of area snakes; remind them to call an adult if they see any snake.

Rattlesnake bites symptoms:

- Pain, tingling or burning at the area of the bite.
 - One or two puncture sites.
 - Swelling.
 - Numbness.
 - Nausea, weakness, lightheadedness.
 - Abdominal pain.
 - Difficulty breathing.
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Snakebite First Aid:

- Immobilize the area and keep at/below the level of the heart.
- If the bite is on the hand or arm, remove any rings, watches or tight clothing.
- Get medical help immediately!!
- If possible, identify the snake (note colors and markings) Do not attempt to catch the snake, or bring it live to the medical care facility!

DO NOT:

- Apply ice.
- Apply any tourniquets (constricting bands).
- Use any electric shock to the wound.
- Use any suction to wound. (Backpackers to areas far removed from any medical care facility may be advised to use suction, but it is not used in an area that has medical care readily available).

The area Trauma Centers are well-stocked with anti-venom and trained to handle rattlesnake bites. In general, Call 911, keep the victim quiet and calm.
