



# SAFETY GRAM



## Advice On Rattlesnake Safety... The Latest on Snakebite First Aid

Fort Hunter Liggett covers 164 thousand acres of land. On this land are many safety issues. One issue to be particularly aware of during this time of year are Rattlesnakes. The warmer weather calls to outdoors enthusiasts and snakes alike, making encounters of the slithering kind inevitable. California has a variety of snakes, most of which are benign. The exception is California's only native venomous snake - **The Rattlesnake**.

Rattlesnakes are the only venomous snake in California and should be left alone; do not kill them they serve us in many ways. Report any sightings of rattlesnake to LEA at 831-386-2526 so they can be moved to a safe location.

Rattlesnakes can cause serious injury to humans - on rare occasions even death. 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 to the mountains at elevations of more than 10,000 feet.

### **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.

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, 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. 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.

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, keep the bite lower than the heart and then try to get to the doctor as quickly as possible. For more first aid information see:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/first-aid-snake-bites/FA00047>

And remember - the only good snake is one that is . . .

. . . alive and well. Snakes, even rattlesnakes, provide humans with a tremendous service--they eat rodents, other reptiles, and insects, and are in turn eaten by other predators.