

# RISK SIMPLIFIED

## RESOURCES

[The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health - Venomous Snakes](#)

[CA Department of Fish and Wildlife - Human-Wildlife Conflicts: Snakes](#)

[UC Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\) Resource – Rattlesnakes](#)

[CA Poison Control System - About Rattlesnakes](#)

## QUESTIONS

[Email PRISM Risk Control](#)  
or call 916.850.7300

## Venomous Snakes

by Scarlett Sadler

Venomous snake bites pose a significant threat to those who spend considerable time outdoors, whether for work or recreation. California is home to nearly 50 native snake species, including many species of rattlesnakes. Outdoor activities can inadvertently lead to dangerous encounters.

### Rattlesnake Characteristics

Rattlesnakes are poisonous snakes known for their rattling tails. However, a rattling sound may not always be heard when a rattlesnake is nearby. Their size may vary, and adults of some species may reach six feet in length. Key features to look for include:

- The shape of the snake's head – Rattlesnakes typically have a broad, triangular-shaped head wider than their neck. This is due to the venom glands located on either side of the head.
- The color pattern on its body – Rattlesnakes often have distinctive color patterns, including diamond, band, or blotch patterns along their bodies. The colors can vary widely depending on the species and the environment they inhabit, ranging from brown and gray to green and yellow.
- The presence of a rattle – In the case of rattlesnakes, the most distinctive feature is the rattle at the end of their tail. When threatened, a rattlesnake will shake its rattle, producing a characteristic buzzing sound as a warning. However, be aware that some rattlesnakes may lose their rattles over time or not rattle when they



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feel threatened.

Rattlesnakes are generally not aggressive and typically strike when they feel threatened or if they are deliberately provoked. When left alone, a rattlesnake typically retreats to its den. The majority of snakebites occur on the hands, feet, and ankles. Rattlesnakes are commonly found in overgrown, remote, rocky, rural areas and along walking trails. They can also be found hiding in various locations, such as beneath buildings or stacked/stored materials. Sometimes, they can be found in the open, hiding in plain sight.

## Recommended Best Practices and Precautions

If a rattlesnake is encountered, it is important to remain calm and avoid sudden movements. Slowly back away from the snake and give it space to escape. Employees should not attempt to handle or provoke any snake unless authorized and trained to do so. Ideally, an agency should have protocols in place for snake removal should an encounter happen inside a facility or in a heavily populated area.

Although snake encounters can happen at any time of the year, most snakebites occur between April and October, when both snakes and humans are most active outdoors. Due to weather and threatening conditions like wildfires and flooding, rattlesnakes may be active at any time of the day or night.

To prevent rattlesnake bites, some effective safety measures that can be taken include:

- When working outdoors, employees should wear appropriate over-the-ankle work boots, thick socks, and loose-fitting long pants. PPE like leather gloves, snake gaiters, or chaps should be available for those working in remote rattlesnake habitats.

- Always remain on walkways, paths, or trails when walking in remote areas.

- Avoid tall grass, weeds, and heavy brush where snakes may be found hiding.
- Look at where your feet are landing when stepping; do not put feet in or near a spot where the bottom cannot be seen.
- Avoid putting hands into holes or other areas where the bottom or end cannot be seen.
- Carefully inspect areas before sitting down.
- If a large rock or fallen tree is encountered, it should be stepped on instead of stepped



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over, as a snake might be on the other side.

- Caution should be taken when picking up debris, moving rocks or gathering tools or materials that have been stored on the ground.
- Avoid overturning rocks, logs, and other debris. If a log or rock must be moved, shovels and gloves should be used, and the item should be rolled toward the employee, allowing anything hiding beneath the object to escape in the opposite direction.
- Never handle freshly killed snakes; they can still bite.

If an employee is bitten, they should immediately seek advanced medical care. About 25 percent of snake bites are “dry” bites, meaning no venom is actually injected during the bite; however, these bites still require prompt medical treatment. Avoid traditional remedies such as applying ice, sucking out the venom, cutting or slicing the bite site, restricting blood flow with a tourniquet, or attempting to self-medicate. These unorthodox treatments can delay access to medical care and are likely to do more harm than good.



Emphasizing preventive measures and safety tips to minimize the risk of snake bites will enhance safety and preparedness and ensure that employees' time outdoors remains safe. For questions about venomous snakes, please contact [Risk Control](#).