

1. Preventing a Snake Bite

- **Do not** tease or try to capture or handle a venomous snake. Snakes will not usually bother humans unless they feel threatened.
- Walk in cleared areas where it is easy to see where you step or reach with your hands.
- Wear protective clothing, such as long pants and boots. Some snakes, such as the rattlesnake, can sense the heat of bare skin.
- Wear gloves when using hands to move rocks or brush. Snakes seek shade during intense summer heat.
- Never put your hands or feet into places where you cannot see.
- Patch holes in your home that are more than a ¼ inch wide. Be careful when working in a crawl space.

2. Symptoms of a Poisonous Snake Bite

- Visible fang mark(s). There may be only one.
- Burning, pain, swelling and bruising at the site of the bite. There may also be bleeding and/or discharge from the wound.
- Other symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and sweating.

3. Caring for a Poisonous Snake Bite

- **Remain calm** and put a safe distance between you and the snake.
- **Call 911** for transport to a medical facility. Antivenom is the only definitive treatment.
- **While awaiting transport:**
 - **Call the New Mexico Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222** for guidance.
 - Remove jewelry or other items that restrict swelling from the bite area.
 - Keep the bite area loosely splinted, immobilized and level with your heart.
- **DO NOT**
 - put ice on the bite
 - try to suck out the venom
 - apply heat or electric shock
 - use a tourniquet or any other local treatments.

These techniques do not help and may cause more tissue damage.

Call the New Mexico Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 for additional first aid advice.

Always carry your cell phone in case of an emergency. **Program it with the Poison Help Hotline: 1-800-222-1222.**

More information about rattlesnakes can be found on the New Mexico Poison Center's website at: hsc.unm.edu/pharmacy/poison.

POISON
Help
1-800-222-1222



The printing for this brochure is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration, grant number H4B HS15529.

NEW MEXICO POISON & DRUG INFORMATION CENTER

New Mexico's Venomous Snakes

Facts, Prevention, and First Aid Advice

POISON
Help
1-800-222-1222



facts



Seasons are spring, summer, and fall in New Mexico. All snakes are predators, animals that kill and eat other animals. Although many of us fear snakes, they are helpful to both humans and the ecosystem because they eat disease-carrying rodents and keep different species in balance.

Because of many people's fear of snakes, history shows us that a strong relationship has existed between humans and these cold-blooded creatures. For example, ancient cultures used many symbols to represent snakes. Designs on pottery, textiles and documents show us that snakes were an important part of religion. In fact, the Snake Clan of the Hopi still celebrates snakes and their connection to humans in a traditional dance.



venomous snakes

Venomous snakes produce venom, a special kind of saliva that is toxic to humans and can lead to death if left untreated. The main purpose of venom is to kill and digest prey. However, a snake will use its venom as a weapon to defend itself against larger animals.

Rattlesnakes

Rattlesnakes are the most common venomous snake in the southwest. Many different types of rattlesnakes live in New Mexico, including: prairie, western diamondback, black-tailed, rock, ridgenose, massasauga and Mojave.



Rattlesnakes belong to the pit viper family. Pit vipers, or crotalidae, have heat-sensing pits that are located below their nostrils. These organs allow pit vipers to sense the body heat of other animals.

The rattles located at the end of their tails make rattlesnakes different from all other snakes. Be aware that rattlesnakes do not always warn their victims or "rattle" before they strike, and the rattle button on very young rattlesnakes does not sound. In New Mexico, about 75 to 100 people are bitten by rattlesnakes every year.

Coral Snakes



Coral snakes can be found in the southwest corner of the state; however the New Mexico Poison Center rarely receives calls about coral snake bites. Although coral snakes are usually too small to bite humans, please be aware that their venom is highly toxic.



rattlesnake (venomous)



coral snake (venomous)



milk snake (non-venomous)

venomous vs. non-venomous snakes

Learning about both harmless and dangerous snakes is important to a peaceful existence between people and these reptiles. The following table points out some differences between venomous and non-venomous snakes.

	physical features	native species
non-venomous	rounded heads rounded pupils sharp teeth but no fangs	gopher snake garter snakes (7 species) hognose snake western coach whip snake desert king snake water snake corn snake *New Mexico milk snake
venomous	triangle-shaped heads elliptical (cat-like) pupils upper jaws with fangs	rattlesnakes: <i>prairie, western diamondback, black-tailed, rock, ridgenose, massasauga and mojave</i> *coral snake

*Coral snake vs. New Mexico Milk Snake

Coral snakes (venomous) are often confused with **New Mexico milk snakes** (non-venomous) because they have similar banding patterns. Coral snakes have a yellow band whereas New Mexico milk snakes do not. In North America, the easiest way to identify coral snakes is to remember this rhyme: "*Red touches yellow will kill a fellow (coral snake). Red touches black, venom lack (New Mexico milk snake).*" However, if it slithers on the ground, it is best if you leave it alone!