

Venomous Snakes in Florida: Identification and Safety

Florida Master Gardener Webinar

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~50 Native Species in Florida

Eastern Garter Snake



Pine Woods Snake



Corn Snake



Eastern Hog-nosed Snake



Snakes play important roles in the Florida environment

Non-venomous Brown Watersnake eating a fish



John Jensen photo

Red-shouldered Hawk eating a snake



Sallie Rich photo

Non-venomous Black Racer eating a Leopard Frog



Some Threats to Snakes



Habitat loss!

Persecution!



Sharon Springs, Kansas



Road mortality!



Only 6 Venomous Species

(Only 4 in **Central and South Florida**)

Copperhead



Florida & Northern Cottonmouth



Coral Snake



Diamond-backed Rattlesnake



Pygmy Rattlesnake



Timber Rattlesnake

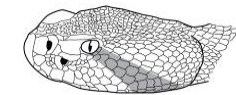


Characteristics of Venomous Pit Vipers

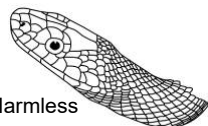
- Thick, blocky head with obvious neck
- Heavy-bodied for their length
- Relatively short, thick tail
- Heat-sensitive pit on side of face
- Complete scales on underside of tail
- Keel scales (in some non-venomous too)
- Often a dark band from eye to corner of jaw
- Elliptical pupil



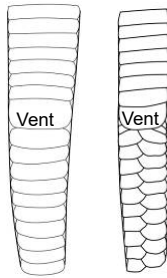
Nonvenomous watersnake



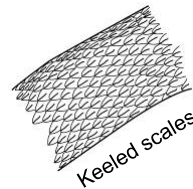
Venomous



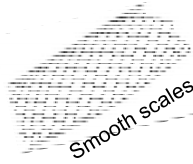
Harmless



Tail scales
complete divided



Keeled scales



Smooth scales



Cottonmouth / Water Moccasin

Adult Cottonmouth



Juvenile Cottonmouth



Distribution in Florida:
Entire State



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Non-venomous Watersnakes (NOT Moccasins)

Florida Green Watersnake



Brown Watersnake



These snakes are often persecuted as Moccasins. They are harmless.

Banded Watersnakes



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Copperhead



Juvenile
Copperhead



Distribution in Florida:
Panhandle



Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnake



Distribution in Florida:
Entire State



Timber Rattlesnake



Distribution in Florida:
North Florida



Pygmy Rattlesnake



Distribution in Florida:
Entire State



Coral Snake



Steve A. Johnson photo



Steve A. Johnson photo

Distribution in Florida:
Entire State



Coral Snake and Non-venomous Look-alikes

Coral Snake



Scarlet Kingsnake



Scarlet Snake



**“Yellow
Red
STOP!”**

Safety Issues

- Do I really need to worry about being bitten by a venomous snake?
- How can I reduce my chances of being bitten by a venomous snake?
- What should I do if I or someone I'm with gets bitten by a venomous snake?

Venomous Snakebite Statistics

-The chances of being bitten by a venomous snake are VERY, VERY small!

-Estimated 7,000-8,000 bites in US each year

-Most occur in southwestern US

-Fatalities are extremely rare!

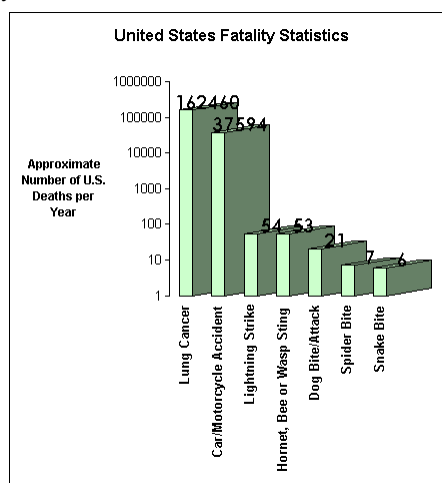
- < 10 deaths in US annually

-Victims are predominantly males 17-27 years old

-Alcohol intoxication is often a factor

-Handling, harassing, or trying to kill a venomous snake is a BAD IDEA

-Most bites occur April-September



Tips for *Safety* around Venomous Snakes and Their Habitats

- Avoid wetland edges and other habitats that may harbor snakes
- Stay alert around wetlands and in thick brush
- Erect barriers to exclude snakes
- Keep grass mowed
- Remove brush piles
- Do not harass or attempt to kill a venomous snake
- Wear jeans and leather gloves while gardening
- Wear close-toe shoes when hiking in the woods



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Snakebite Action Plan

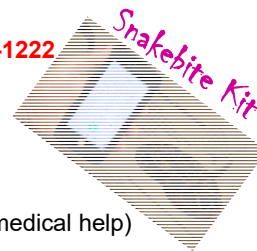
- Obtain prompt medical care—call 911 immediately!**
- Call the Poison Control Centers National Hotline 1-800-222-1222**

DO!

- Get the victim away from the snake
- Keep bitten extremity lower than victim's heart
- Wash the bite area with soap and water (do not delay seeking medical help)
- Keep victim warm; as comfortable as possible; offer reassurance
- Remove bracelets, rings, watches or restrictive clothing on bitten extremities

DO NOT!

- Wait to seek medical attention until symptoms develop
- Apply a tourniquet to a bitten extremity
- Make incisions and attempt to suck out venom
- Apply ice to the bite
- Attempt to capture the snake to ensure identification
- Handle a "dead" venomous snake



Take Home Messages

- Only 6 of Florida's 50 native snake species are venomous
- Only 4 venomous species occur in central Florida
- Venomous species can be easily identified with a bit of practice
- The chance of being bitten by a venomous snake is VERY, VERY small!
- It is best to leave all snakes alone to play their role in Florida's ecosystems
- Venomous and non-venomous snakes alike should be respected, not feared
- If bitten, call 911 and seek immediate medical care!!!
- Continue to learn about Florida's fascinating snakes and spread the word



“Dealing with Florida’s Snakes: Identification, Exclusion and Safety”

An educational program prepared by:

Dr. Steve A. Johnson, Dr. Martin B. Main, Monica E. McGarrity, and others
University of Florida—IFAS

Want to know more about snake safety? Visit <http://ufwildlife.ifas.ufl.edu> and follow the link on the left to “Dealing with Snakes” to find links to available products and resources:

- Snake Safety **PowerPoint presentations** with speaking notes – FREE!
- **Fact sheets** about venomous snake safety, excluding snakes from schoolyards and homes, identifying the “black snakes,” native Pinesnakes, and more... FREE!
- **Handouts and coloring sheets** for children – FREE!
- **Venomous Snakes of the Southeast poster** (for sale in English or Spanish – IFAS bookstore)
- **Venomous Snakes of the Southeast CD/DVD set** (for sale – IFAS bookstore)
- **ID Guide to the Snakes of Florida** (for sale – IFAS bookstore)

