

Snakes in Hesperia

Should your intruder come in the form of a **snake**, the proper authority to contact would be the Hesperia Animal Control. Because of warmer conditions this spring, encounters with our desert neighbors have become more common. The most dangerous is the Mojave rattlesnake that has venom unique to other California rattlesnakes in that it attacks the nervous system and can lead to paralysis.



Although rattlesnakes have several distinctive features, many people are not sure how to identify one. Using the snake's color or pattern is not a reliable method of identification. Looking for the characteristic rattle on the tail is a good method, but sometimes these rattles are lost.

Rattlesnakes do have powerful bodies, thin necks and well defined triangular or arrow shaped heads. Their eyes are hooded and the pupils of the eyes are oval rather than round.

In comparison, non-poisonous snakes have round pupils in their eyes. A non-poisonous snake tends to look more like a snake a child rolls out of clay: the head, neck and body have approximately the same diameter. They do not share the distinct skinny neck of the rattlesnake. This is true only of snakes native to California and does not apply to exotic or imported snakes.

It is important to realize that the Pacific Gopher snake and the common Bull snake have markings that are similar to a rattlesnake. These rattlesnake-like markings are a protective defense against enemies. But neither the Gopher Snake nor the Bull snake has the distinctive skinny neck that a rattler has. Still many people are fooled into thinking that a Gopher or Bull snake is a rattlesnake. Bull snakes and Gopher snakes can cause a painful bite but they are not dangerous like a rattlesnake. Be safe and smart, leave snakes alone and avoid being bitten. Animal control officers are trained in the proper methods of removing dangerous snakes.

If a snake bites you, call 911 immediately. Try to calm the victim and apply a cold, wet cloth over the bite. If out in the desert, transport to the nearest emergency facility for treatment. Don't apply a tourniquet, pack the bite area in ice, cut the wound with a razor or knife, use your mouth to suck out venom, allow victim to drink alcohol or apply electric shock. None of these will help the victim and are dangerous.

To avoid being bitten:

- Never go barefoot or wear sandals when walking in the rough. Always wear hiking boots.
- Always stay on paths. Avoid tall grass, weeds and heavy underbrush where there may be snakes.
- Use a walking stick when hiking. If you come across a snake, it can strike the stick instead of you.
- Always look for concealed snakes before picking up rocks, sticks or firewood.
- Always check carefully around stumps or logs before sitting.
- When climbing, always look before putting your hands in a new location. Snakes can climb walls, trees and rocks and are frequently found at high altitudes.
- Never grab "sticks" or "branches" while swimming. Rattlesnakes are excellent swimmers.
- Baby rattlesnakes are poisonous! They can and do bite.
- Never hike alone. Always have a buddy to help in case of an emergency. Learn basic life-saving methods.
- Do not handle fresh killed snakes. You may still be bitten.
- Never tease a snake to see how far it can strike. You can be several feet from the snake and still be within striking distance.
- Do not keep rattlesnakes as pets. The majority of bites occur when people tease or play with their "pet" rattlesnake.
- Teach children to respect snakes and to leave snakes alone. Curious children who pick up snakes are frequently bitten.