

Rattlesnake Envenomation in Dogs and Cats

Source: Most snake bites in Colorado occur from the Western Diamondback Rattlesnake (*This can vary due to region, with other snakes such as Water Moccasins, Copperheads, other species of rattlesnake, and Coral Snakes being toxic as well.*)

General Information: Most snake bites occur on the head and legs, although anywhere is possible. Bites affecting the eyes, tongue or trunk have a more guarded prognosis. Snake bites can affect the cardiovascular system, blood clotting system, and cause local swelling and tissue death at the site of the bite. The toxic dose of envenomation varies, and the dose of venom is not related to the size of the snake.



Signs: Small puncture wounds at the site of the bite are usually visible, typically with immediate pain, swelling and bruising at the site. **Other more delayed signs may include:** shock, low or high blood pressure, high heart rate, blood clotting disorders and effects on the red blood cells, as well as other systemic signs.

Immediate action: Seek veterinary care immediately. **DO NOT** apply a tourniquet. **DO NOT** incise the bite wound to try and aspirate the venom.

Veterinary Care: Immediate care typically includes pain medication, hospitalization, IV fluids and treatment for shock, Antivenin and antibiotics. Monitoring blood work for blood clotting abnormalities and signs of other organ damage should be done for 24-72 hours. If clotting disorders develop, transfusions may be necessary. Additional newer treatments that have shown great benefit include laser therapy as well as hyperbaric oxygen treatments. These help to reduce swelling and minimize local tissue damage.

Vaccination: There is a rattlesnake vaccine available, however there are no current controlled studies in dogs to show efficacy. You should know that even if your dog is vaccinated, veterinary treatment is still needed **immediately**, and the same treatment will be recommended whether your dog has been vaccinated or not.

Prognosis: Most pets have a good prognosis with proper and aggressive care.