Your Pet & Venomous Snakes: Part II

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Ruth has more than 15 years of experience in the veterinary industry as a companion animal veterinarian in private practice. Along with being a writer and media personality, she is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

Dr. Ruth MacPete*'s message to you this summer? Watch out for snakes when you're out and about with your pet! In Part I, Dr. MacPete gave an overview of rattlesnake dangers in the US. In Part II, she discusses what you should do in the event your pet is bitten by a rattler. For more from Dr. MacPete, find her on Facebook or at www.drruthpetvet.com!*

What should you do if your pet is bitten by a rattlesnake?

There are currently no definitive tests to determine if an animal was bitten by a venomous snake or to measure how much venom was injected. Diagnosis is based on knowledge of a snakebite or a history of being in an area inhabited by snakes and the presence of clinical signs. Blood work to look for echinocytes (abnormal looking red blood cells) can also help confirm a suspected snakebite.

Treatment

Venomous snakebites are emergencies. If a rattlesnake bites your pet take them to a veterinary clinic immediately. If possible, call your veterinarian to ensure they have anti-venom available. If not, they may suggest that you go to a veterinary emergency clinic instead. If the snakebite occurs after hours, take your pet to a veterinary emergency clinic immediately. Treatment for a rattlesnake bite typically involves administration of intravenous fluids to improve blood pressure, pain medications, wound cleaning and, most importantly, anti-venom to neutralize the venom.

Precautions

Now that you're terrified about rattlesnake bites, what should you do? Should you keep your dogs inside all summer? No! Just be sure to take these measures to lower your pet's risk of encountering a rattlesnake:

- Get rid of their food source. If you have rodents around your home, yard or garage, they could be attracting snakes.
- Get rid of their hiding places. Clean up overgrown foliage and woodpiles where snakes like to hide.
- When hiking, keep your dogs on leash. This way, if you encounter a snake, you can pull your dog away from the snake quickly.
- While hiking, keep your dog out of brush, tall weeds or grass. The safest thing is to keep your dog on a leash (this is better for the environment, too).
- If you have encountered snakes in your yard before, always check your yard before letting your pets outside.
- If you live in a rattlesnake dense area, consider signing your dog up for a rattlesnake avoidance class. These classes try to teach your dog to avoid snakes.
- If you live in rattlesnake territory, ask your veterinarian if they have anti-venom in the clinic. If they don't, you will at least know ahead of time to take your pet directly to a veterinary emergency clinic if they are bitten by a rattlesnake.
- Protecting cats from poisonous snakes is easy: just keep them indoors!

Remember, if your pet is bitten by a rattlesnake, do not apply a tourniquet, ice packs or heat, or attempt to suck the venom out. Instead take your pet to the veterinarian immediately. Rattlesnakes bites in pets are serious and can be fatal if untreated, so seek veterinary assistance immediately.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.