

Snakebite: First Aid

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What to Do

- Muzzle your pet to avoid being bitten – snakebites can be painful, and your pet may try to protect herself.
- Immobilize the part of the animal that has been bitten by the snake, if this can be done safely. Try to keep it at or below the level of the heart.
- Keep the pet calm and immobile; carry if necessary.
- Seek veterinary attention as soon as possible.
- Try to identify the snake if it can be done without risk: **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE OR KILL THE SNAKE**. It is helpful to identify the type of snake to aid your veterinarian with treatment. Do not bring the snake into the veterinarian's office – a photograph will do.

What NOT to Do

- Do not cut over the fang marks.
- Do not attempt to suck out the venom.
- Do not attempt to capture or kill the snake
- Do not manipulate the bitten area any more than needed.
- Do not allow the pet to move about freely.
- Do not ice pack or tourniquet the area.
- Do not administer any medications except on a veterinarian's advice.

Snakebite is a complex problem. The severity and type of damage done by venom depends on the type of snake involved, the age of the snake, and the size of the pet who was bitten. The vast majority of pets who are bitten by a snake will survive, but medical attention is vital to ensure the best outcome.

Some snakes have venom that causes severe shock and rapid death. Others have most of their effect on the muscles or have effects that can be delayed by days or weeks. Some venom is concentrated and some isn't, thus requiring a large quantity before damage is done.

The first goal in snakebite treatment is to keep the venom from circulating in large quantity throughout the body. However, keeping all the venom in the area of a bite (as happens with ice packs or tourniquets) may cause severe muscle damage. Antivenin administered at the hospital is the most direct and helpful treatment for your pet. Antivenin can cause severe allergic reactions in some pets, and must be administered under controlled conditions and monitored closely. Most pets that have been bitten will need to be admitted to the hospital for treatment, and some pets can have large areas of dead tissue that need to be surgically cleaned over several days or weeks.

If your pet is bitten by a snake, assume the bite is venomous and seek veterinary attention quickly.

If your pet is bitten by a snake, it is best to assume it is a venomous bite.