

MAFES Dawg Tracks

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MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
MS AGRICULTURAL AND
FORESTRY EXPERIMENT STATION

*Safety Tips:
Protection from Snakes*

Venous snakes found in the USA include rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths/water moccasins and coral snakes. All of these varieties can be dangerous to outdoor workers including farmers, ranchers, foresters, gardeners and all types of outdoor construction workers.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each year there are an estimated 7,000 to 8,000 people that receive venous snakebites, but only about 5 of these cases will die. They believe that more of these folks would die, except that they get medical prevention that helps to revive them. My hope is that everyone who gets this newsletter will take the time to read about these snakes, and that the word will get passed around to those not exposed to this newsletter.

Personally, I don't want to be around any type of snake. Snakes have been referred to as "Police of Nature," as they do help control rats, insects and snakes. According to the experts our chances of getting bitten by a poisonous snake is lower than getting by lightning.

However, if you want to take as many precautions as possible to avoid a snakebite, then follow these tips:

- ✓ Clean up debris and idle refuse, as well as other hiding spots around your property.
- ✓ Wear boots and long pants in heavily wooded areas.
- ✓ Watch and walk very carefully around areas where snakes will rest and are nesting.

Most poisonous snakes in the US family are in the viper family and can be identified by the following characteristics:

- ~ Pits on the head
- ~ Vertical pupils
- ~ A triangular head
- ~ Slim neck
- ~ A heavy body with a single row of scales on the underside of its tail.

The viper group is made up of copperhead and cottonmouths and 2 major categories of rattlesnakes. All the pit vipers vibrate their tails rapidly to make noise when they are threatened. Cottonmouths and copperheads are often referred to as moccasins, but they are 2 distinct categories within the pit viper group.

Following are some characteristics of the ones that we might see here in Mississippi:

Rattlesnakes – There are many varieties that have pit viper characteristics:

- Button on their tail plus 2-4 segments of rattles each year.
- Sizes range from 15 to 72 inches long.
- The record is 96 inches on an Eastern Diamondback.

Copperheads – There are 5 categories of copperheads that have pit viper characteristics.

- Bands of brown, copper or red on a tan body.
- Sizes range from 20 to 36 inches long.
- Regional differences are identified by color and size.
- All have a bright tip on their tail.
- The largest copperhead seen was 56 inches long.

Cottonmouth – The cottonmouth is semi-aquatic, with the pit characteristics.

- Adults have a solid-colored upper body that is olive, brown or black with a lighter color underside.
- Sometimes it's hard to differentiate between a cottonmouth and a non-poisonous water snake.
- Sizes range from 30 to 74 inches long.
- The largest on record is 74 inches long.

Ted Gordon-Risk Mgmt. / Loss Control Mgr.
MAFES / EXTENSION (662) 566-2201 2/23/2016

Excerpts: www.wildlife.mgt.com
www.cdc.gov/topics

In south Mississippi you can find coral snakes which have:

- Distinct markings of red and black stripes, separated by yellow.
- Arc sometimes confused with the non-venous scarlet king snake, which has yellow bands, with red and black bands together.
- Have oval heads and round pupils- unlike vipers.
- Have a very toxic venom - but aren't very aggressive.

According to the snake gurus or experts, very few snakes are aggressive. Even when a cottonmouth is swimming toward you, it is more out of curiosity than aggression. They also say that snakes can only strike 2/3 of the length of their body, so a 3-foot snake could reach about 2 feet away.

IDENTIFYING SNAKE BITES-

If you are bitten by a snake, which we hope never happens, you should be familiar with what type of bite it is.

- Venous snakes will leave 2 distinct puncture wounds.
- Non-venomous may leave marks that resemble stretch marks.

IN CASE OF A BITE-

If you are bitten by a venous snake:

- Get to a hospital ASAP!
- If there is a delay in getting to the hospital, wrap a constricting band between the bite and the heart to slow down the blood flow, but not so tight as to cut off the flow completely.
- Do not apply a tourniquet.
- Your best alternative is to rush to the hospital, if possible, than to mess with first aid.
- With pets- get them to a veterinary clinic ASAP.
- Be extra careful with small snakes. They are harder to identify than larger ones and will inject more venom.

OTHER PRECAUTIONS IN CASE OF A BITE-

- If the snake is still in the area, don't try to kill or catch it, unless it poses a danger to the victim. Try to remember what it looks like so you can help identify it from pictures in the emergency room.
- Remove all items that might restrict circulation, like jewelry, gloves or shoes that could be a problem as the bite begins to swell.
- Immobilize the area as much as possible and keep the bite slightly below level of the head.
- If swelling occurs, place a 1-inch constricting band 2 inches above the bite. The tension should be so that you can slip a finger under it.

DON'T:

- Give the victim any food or drink. (definitely no alcohol)
- Place the bite in ice.
- Make any cuts or attempt to suck of the venom.
- Attempt to administer or give anti-venom.
- Administer pain or anti-anxiety medication.

FOR HELP – CALL THE REGIONAL POISON CONTROL CENTER-

@601-354-7660

***IF YOU FIDGET WITH A SNAKE
YOU MIGHT LOSE A DIGIT!
PUT SAFETY FIRST
PREVENT WORST!!!***