



Protect pets from rattlesnake bites this summer

**By Dr. Laura Higgins
Emergency Veterinarian
Aspen Meadow Veterinary Specialists
Longmont**

Colorado is home to 25 different species of snakes, two of which are venomous and a potential threat to your pet. Prairie (western) rattlesnakes are found throughout Colorado whereas the Massasauga snake is found only in the southeastern grasslands of Colorado. Snakes are nonaggressive and only strike when startled or threatened. Venomous snakes are identified by rattles, a broad head and narrow neck, fangs (in addition to rows of teeth), and elongated pupils.

- If your pet is bitten by a snake, keep him/her quiet and seek veterinary attention.
- Do not use a tourniquet.
- Do not cut open the wound or attempt to suck out the venom.
- It is important that both you and your pet stay calm and seek treatment immediately.

Rattlesnake bites (or envenomations) result in painful wounds that can progress to bleeding, respiratory distress, organ failure, and even death. Juvenile snakes result in the most severe envenomations. The most common sites for snake bites are the face and limbs of curious or unsuspecting pets. Pets that are bitten in the neck are at risk of an airway obstruction. With aggressive treatment large breed dogs typically recover well. Small dogs and cats may have a more guarded prognosis due to their size.

Twenty-five percent of snakebites do not result in envenomation (dry bites), therefore only minimal pain and inflammation may result. However, there is no way to measure the amount of venom injected; therefore, it is important to ALWAYS seek veterinary medical attention.

On average, dogs and cats are treated in the hospital for two to three days. Recommended monitoring and treatments include blood tests, fluids, pain medication, anti-inflammatories, antibiotics, and antivenin.

Recently, a rattlesnake vaccine has become available but its efficacy is unproven and many veterinarians do not recommend its use. Currently, emergency medical treatment by a veterinarian remains the best way to deal with rattlesnake envenomations.

Enjoy Colorado's sunshine with your pet, but keep the following tips in mind:

- Avoid rattlesnake bites by keeping your pet close by on hikes.

- Leash them if you suspect snakes are in the area (many trails will mark snake sightings).
- If a snake is encountered, quietly leave with your pet.
- Do not attempt to kill the snake.

For more information regarding treatment of snake bites, go to www.AspenMeadowVet.com.