



Carolinas HealthCare System

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News Alert:

Calls to NC Poison Control Center about Snake Bites Have Nearly Quadrupled

Charlotte—Carolinas Poison Center has seen a near quadrupling of calls about snake bites as compared to this same time last year. A milder winter is thought to be a contributing factor to the spike. In April 2017, the center received 71 calls about snake bites as compared to 19 calls in April 2016.

Copperheads, cottonmouths, rattlesnakes (eastern diamondback, pigmy, and timber), and the coral snake are the venomous species native to North Carolina. The coral is the most rare, and the copperhead is the most plentiful. The Carolinas Poison Control Center receives 10 times the number of calls about copperhead bites than all other snakes combined.

Many people are unaware that a poison control center is one of the best places to turn to if bitten by a snake. "Venom is poison, and we handle all kinds of poison exposures—including exposures to venom," said Dr. Michael C. Beuhler, Medical Director of the Carolinas Poison Center. "We help treat around 500 snake bites statewide every year." With this increase, snake bite calls are anticipated to hit well over the 500 mark for the year.

Most of the calls Carolinas Poison Center receives about snake bites come from other doctors and nurses looking for treatment recommendations for patients arriving at their facilities. Treatment is based on a number of factors including the type of snake involved, the amount of venom injected, and the health of the person bitten.

If bitten, Carolinas Poison Control Center can help a person determine if hospital care is needed. A surprising number of snake bites can be treated and watched at home with the help of a poison control center. About half of all snake bites that the poison center is consulted about can be treated without antivenom. This can be a big cost savings for snake-bitten patients. Carolinas Poison Center will also follow up with the patient to ensure the healthiest outcome and answer questions.

There are several things people can do to lessen their chance of being bitten:

- Check boots and shoes that are laying in the garage or outside before putting them on.
- Wear sturdy boots or shoes when outside, especially when gardening or hiking.
- Watch your step when outside and watch where your hands go—use a flashlight if it's dark.
- Back away slowly if you see a snake. Don't try to pick it up or move it. Snakes can bite when they feel threatened.

If bitten by a snake, call Carolinas Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222. A hospital visit may not be necessary.

If bitten, there are also some things people can do to make the situation worse. If bitten DO NOT:

- Cut the bitten area and suck the venom out. This can cause infection.
- Ice the area. Icing causes additional tissue damage.
- Apply a tourniquet or tight bandage. It's better for the venom to flow through the body.
- Attempt to catch or kill the snake. You might get bitten again.

Anyone in North Carolina can order a free snake prevention pack from Carolinas Poison Center by visiting www.NCPoisonCenter.org and clicking on "Shop Education Materials."

The Carolinas Poison Center offers North Carolina residents free and confidential phone or online assistance with poisoning emergencies and questions about poisons. The number to Carolinas Poison Center is **1-800-222-1222**. Program the number for quick and easy access. Nurses, pharmacists, and doctors who are experts in poisonings handle the calls. Carolinas Poison Center is one of 55 poison centers serving the U.S. and is certified by the American Association of Poison Control Centers.

Media Note: A spokesperson from the poison center can be available for interviews.

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