

SNAKE!

What to know about snakebites!

There used to be a lot of Copperheads around here when I was a kid. I remember seeing small ones a number of times throughout my childhood, but I haven't seen any for years. Nevertheless, Copperheads still share Morris County with us, so I thought I'd review the latest snakebite procedures, just in case.



Of course, since I'm not a doctor, I plan on having my cell phone with me at all times when I am enjoying nature - so I can dial 911. I was interested to learn a few commonsense steps to take when bitten by a potentially poisonous snake. I checked out www.mayoclinic.com, firstaid.webmed.com, and a few other sites to get a consensus.

First, I'm going to try to avoid getting bitten in the first place. I generally wear long pants and heavy boot when I'm working in brush, because I'm really allergic to poison ivy. After doing this research, I'm going to be more aware of where I step and where I'm reaching my hands when I'm pulling stones out of the woods or moving branches, etc. Snakes are afraid of people and generally slither the other way if they sense us coming - they do not enjoy surprises!

However, if despite my precautions, someone I'm with gets bitten, here's what the first aid experts recommend:

- Get away from the snake! They are not bees - they live after they bite and can bite again and again! It might help if you can describe the snake for the rescue team, but it's not a deal breaker - better not to get bitten again.
- Remove constricting items, like jewelry, etc.
- Wash the bitten area with soap and water.
- Keep calm - move as little as possible to avoid speeding up the spread of the poison throughout the body.
- Immobilize the bitten area, if possible, while also transporting yourself or the victim to the hospital as quickly as possible. Try to keep the bitten area lower than the heart.

Do Not:

- Do **not** try to kill the snake. After you've called 911, you could maybe take a photo of it without going near it; otherwise, forget it.
- Do **not attempt to** "cut and suck" the venom out (does very little good, if any; and generally, does harm).
- Do **not** use ice (may cause frostbite)
- Do **not** use alcohol (may increase absorption of venom)
- Do **not** use tourniquets

Important! The best thing to do is avoid getting bitten in the first place! If you are going to be in an area where you could encounter a snake:

- Wear long pants and boots
- Stay on the path
- Watch where you reach your hands
- Bring your phone and a friend

A Few Facts about Snakes:

Did you know that all snakes in New Jersey are protected under the NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Conservation Act (N.J.S.A. 23:2A-1-13)? It is illegal for anyone to kill, collect, or harass our native snake species.

Often, the non-venomous northern water snake is misidentified as the water moccasin (cottonmouth), which does not occur in New Jersey.

Snakes do not chase people. Mostly, snakes will try to get away from people, whom snakes perceive to be predators and thus, something to be avoided.

In New Jersey, it is illegal to keep any venomous snake in captivity unless it is at an educational or rehabilitative facility or zoo. These facilities must have the appropriate permit(s).

Northern Copperheads give birth to 6-17 young in mid-August to early October.

There's all kinds of helpful information in the New Jersey Snake Brochure from the DEP - http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/ensp/pdf/snake_broch07.pdf

I also checked out the following websites:

http://firstaid.about.com/od/bitesstings/ht/O6_snakebites.htm

<http://firstaid.webmd.com/snakebite-treatment>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/first-aid-snake-bites/FA00047>

<http://www.fish.state.pa.us/copprhe.htm>

It was interesting. Enjoy! (But wear boots!)

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