



*Asociación
de Colonias
de Todos Santos A.C.T.S.*

Rattlesnake Bites:

What to do if you are bitten here in Baja Sur

What to watch for:

There are at least three varieties of rattlesnakes here in Baja California Sur, and they may be present virtually anywhere people go, so first of all, it is prudent to be aware and to keep your eyes open for them. Use a flashlight when walking at night, and don't reach into or over things when you can't see where you are reaching. These simple precautions will prevent the large majority of bites.

There are no other seriously venomous reptiles here in southern Baja. Other venomous species, such as coral snakes and Gila monsters, do not live in this region.

I recommend that everyone spending significant time here take a good look at the locally available book, "Amphibians and Reptiles of Baja California" by Ron H. McPeak. It has good color photos of all of the poisonous and non-poisonous species in the region.

A Little bit about rattlesnake bites in general:

While rattlesnake bites should always be taken very seriously, most bites are not fatal and do not cause long-term harm. In the USA and Canada, where emergency medical services and the availability of antivenom treatment are widely available, the mortality from poisonous snakebites is less than 1%. Prior to the availability of antivenom, the mortality was between 5% and 36%, depending on the study. Without any treatment at all, of course, the risks are much greater.

Rattlesnake venom causes two types of injury. It can cause significant injury to the tissues in the area of the bite, and it can cause a variety of systemic, or body-wide problems as well. Proper treatment, both first aid and hospital-based treatment can reduce or prevent the majority of serious consequences.

So someone has been bitten: what do I do now?

First: get the person away from the snake, and don't get bitten in the process. Dead rattlesnakes can bite due to a reflex! Also, it is a good idea to take a digital photo of the snake with your camera or cell phone for later identification, if readily available, unless you are positive of the type of snake. And don't waste time killing the snake. The victim is your first concern.



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Second: keep the victim supine (lying flat on his or her back), warm, and as calm as possible. Then arrange for them to be transported to the nearest facility that can provide definitive care, preferably by ambulance. This means a hospital with the ability to give antivenom treatment, if warranted. **You have some time. Antivenom treatment is most effective if started within six hours after the bite.**

Third: immobilize the affected body part in a comfortable position at the level of the heart, and remove any rings, watches or restrictive clothing from the affected extremity.

Fourth: cleanse the wound with soap and water.

Fifth: Do Not Do any of the following, in spite of what you may have learned before. Medical knowledge changes:

- no cutting or sucking the wound, it doesn't help and tends to cause infection
- don't apply any form of tourniquet or pressure bandage. It may cause more local damage, and it doesn't improve the outcome
- don't apply ice, give aspirin, alcohol or drugs which might impair the assessment of the patient by emergency medical personnel

What should you expect in the Emergency Department?

Hopefully you will have been able to call ahead to verify that the victim is being taken to the appropriate facility (one with antivenom available). The phone numbers follow. All rattlesnake bites should be treated by someone familiar with the use of antivenom. It is strongly advised that an experienced toxicologist be contacted before making the decision to treat with antivenom. There are such experts available via telephone here in Mexico, in Guadalajara and Mexico City, as well as in the USA, via toll- free numbers 24/7. This is important both to ensure that antivenom is given correctly and in proper doses, and that it is not given when not indicated. Also, because there is a risk of severe allergic reaction to the antivenom, and the treating personnel must be prepared in the event that should happen.

What about animals bitten by a rattlesnake?

The veterinary literature available to me yields more or less the same information for the treatment of rattlesnake bites as in humans. Antivenom is usually used if the bite occurred within the past 24 hours, and supportive treatment is provided. The first step would be to call or go immediately to one of the local vets. It might be necessary to transport the animal to La Paz or Cabo, or you may need to go there to obtain antivenom, but start with the local vet. Many of them have dealt with this before.



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Important phone numbers:

Emergency Department Phone Numbers and Information Los Cabos and La Paz

Call first to be sure they have the antivenom

Toxicologist Consultation Phone Numbers

All should be available 24/7, according to the information given by each

Guadalajara:

Centro Regional de Información y Atención Toxicológica: +52 33 120 17 204; +52 33 120 17 203; Emergency: +52 33 36 69 13 38

Mexico City:

Centro de Información y Asistencia Toxicológica Hospital de Pediatría Centro Médico Nacional Siglo XXI, IMSS: +52 5627 69 00 extn 22317; +52 5761 02 58

Servicio de Información Toxicológica Sintox: +52 55 5611 2634; +52 55 5598 9095; +52 55 5598 6666; Emergency: 1 800 009 2800

Centro de Información y Asistencia Toxicológica Centro Médico Nacional La Raza +52 55 5572 45900 extn 23364; Emergency: +52 44 55 39 397 381

Centro de Información y Asistencia Toxicológica: +55 574 77516; Emergency: +55 399 36665

USA:

SALVATIERRA LA PAZ: 612-175-0506 and 0503 #4 Emergency

FIDEPAZ: 612-124-0400

AMERIMED CABO SAN LUCAS: 624-105-8500 AMERIMED SAN JOSE DEL CABO: 624-105-8550

American Association of Poison Control Centers, +1-800-222-1222 Protherics, manufacturer of the antivenom: +1-877-377-3784

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