

Rattlesnake Bite

Rattlesnake is the only venomous snake native to BC. A rattlesnake bite can inject venom that affects your blood, muscles, or nervous system. Symptoms can develop quickly and may become serious if not treated right away. Not all rattlesnake bites inject venom ('dry bites'), but all bites should be treated as emergencies.

In the future if you are bitten by a rattlesnake, stay still and calm and remove any jewelry or tight clothing before swelling starts. Clean the bite with soap and water if time allows and go to the emergency department as soon as possible as serious complications can appear. Cover or wrap the wound loosely with a clean, dry bandage. **Do not** tie off the bite, use a tourniquet, apply ice, cut the bite, or attempt to remove the venom. **Avoid** aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen sodium as they increase bleeding risk. **Don't** try to catch the snake; remember its color and shape for identification and take a picture from a safe distance.



What to Expect

You may notice symptoms within minutes to hours after the bite, such as:

- Pain, swelling, or bruising at the bite site
- Nausea, vomiting, or weakness
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- Numbness or tingling around the mouth, scalp, or limbs
- Unusual bleeding (from gums or wounds) or blood in urine

On average, it could take **a few weeks to a few months** before you feel better depending on the severity of the bite and the person's overall health.



Recommended Follow-Up

☐ Follow up in _ _ _ days.

Name of Provider

Reason

Date/Time

Location

Contact Info

☐ _____

☐ _____



When to Get Help

See a pharmacist, your health care provider, go to a walk-in clinic, or call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for the hearing impaired) if:

- You have questions about which health service(s) you should seek care from for (new) symptoms.
- You have questions about your medications you were prescribed during your visit.

See your health care provider, go to a walk-in clinic, or call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for the hearing impaired) if:

- The swelling or bruising is not improving after one week.
- Skin appears black and dies around the wound.
- You have ongoing stiffness, numbness, or pain near the bite after two weeks.
- You were told to have follow-up blood tests or wound care.
- You are unsure if the wound is healing properly.

Go to the nearest emergency department or call 9-1-1 immediately if:

- Your pain suddenly gets much worse.
- The swelling around the bite spreads rapidly or becomes firm and hard.
- You develop a fever (temperature over 38.5°C or 101.3°F).
- You feel faint, weak, confused, or have trouble breathing.
- There is oozing pus, new redness, or pink streaks from the bite area – these may be signs of infection.
- You were told you might need more antivenom, and your symptoms return or worsen.

To Learn More:

- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/rattlesnake-bite>

Notes:

Additional Information

- Your pharmacy can assess and prescribe for several ailments. For more information see: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/accessing-health-care/pharmacy-services>





How to Care for Yourself at Home

Medication

To treat your pain, you can use Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) 500 to 1,000 mg every 6 hours to a maximum of 4,000 mg in a 24-hour period.



Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen sodium as they increase bleeding risk.

Diet

- Keep hydrated.



Activity

- Rest and keep bitten area in a comfortable position.
- When possible, elevate the bite above the level of your heart.
- Avoid unnecessary exercise, such as jogging, playing sports, or doing chores that need a lot of effort for the first few days. Increase activity as you feel better.



REFERENCES

- Mayo Clinic – Snake Bites: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-snake-bites/basics/art-20056681>
- CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/outdoor-workers/about/venomous-snakes.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes/default.html

Find this information sheet on the ECBC website:

https://emergencycarebc.ca/clinical_resource/patient-information-sheet/snake-bite/