

Rattlesnake Bite

The Western Rattlesnake, also known as the Northern Pacific Rattlesnake (*Crotalus oreganus*) is the only venomous snake native to BC. Its bite can inject venom that contains a mixture of toxins that can cause a severe allergic reaction, as well as tremendous local tissue cell death (necrosis), damage to nerves, blood vessels and blood cells causing you to bleed internally. All this can result in serious organ damage and if untreated death occurs over 2-3 days. Not all rattlesnake bites inject venom ('dry bites'), but all bites should be treated as emergencies.



What to Expect

What you can expect will depend on how much venom got into your tissues, what part of your body was bitten, how your body reacts to the bite, your overall health, and if/when you got antivenom. Rattlesnake bite wounds heal differently compared to typical animal bites since snake bites destroy tissue and may require weeks to months to fully heal. Swelling, pain, and tenderness at the bite site can persist for several weeks, even with antivenom treatment. Long term complications such as nerve pain or chronic pain are rare.

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 medications you were prescribed during your visit.

Notes:

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

- You were told to have follow-up blood tests or wound care.
- Your pain medication is not making the pain bearable.
- The wound becomes increasingly red, swollen or painful day by day.
- The swelling, bruising, stiffness, numbness, or pain near the bite is not improving after two weeks.
- You are unsure if the wound is healing properly or the area of blackness or dead tissue around the wound increases day by day (it helps to take pictures every day or so).
- You develop hives, muscle/joint pains or fever up to 3 weeks after receiving antivenom. If severe go to Emergency Department/call 911.

Go to the nearest Emergency Department or call 911 immediately if:

- Your pain suddenly gets much worse.
- Swelling around the bite spreads rapidly or becomes firm and hard.
- Your wound starts bleeding, or you have bleeding from your nose or other parts of your body or easy bruising.
- You develop a fever (temperature over 38.5°C or 101.3°F).
- You feel faint, weak, dizzy, confused, develop hives (itchy body rash), throat tightness, chest pain, wheezing, or trouble breathing.
- There is oozing pus, new rapidly expanding redness over hours, or streaks from the bite area, all of which may be signs of infection.
- Your urine (pee) turns dark (like Coca-Cola) or you urinate less often than is normal for you.

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>
- Information about BC's health services: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/find-care>



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. Use a maximum of 2,000 mg in a 24-hour period if you have liver problems.



Your health care provider may provide you with stronger pain medication – use as directed.

Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen sodium for 2 weeks as they increase bleeding risk.

Diet

Keep hydrated and eat a balanced healthy diet.



Activity

- Rest and keep bitten area in a comfortable position.
- When possible, elevate the bite above the level of your heart.
- Clean the bite area every day with mild soap and water or as directed by your health care provider.
- Avoid exercise or chores that need a lot of effort for at least two weeks. Increase activity as you feel better.
- Avoid contact sports, dental work or minor surgery for two weeks.
- It can be helpful to take pictures of your wound daily to check for changes or in case you need to show them to a health care provider



If you received antivenom:

- You may have received antivenom in the hospital to stop the effects of the rattlesnake venom.
- You were monitored until your symptoms improved and your blood tests were normal.
- After going home, you will need blood tests every 2 to 3 days for 1 week. These tests check:
 - **INR** – how well your blood clots
 - **Fibrinogen** – a protein that helps with blood clotting
 - **Platelets** – cells that help stop bleeding

Rattlesnake Bite Discharge Instructions - continued

- Watch for a delayed reaction called **serum sickness**, which can happen up to 3 weeks after treatment. Get medical help if you develop:
 - Fever
 - Muscle or joint pain
 - Rash or hives

If you did not receive antivenom:

- You likely did not need antivenom if you only had fang marks and didn't have swelling, bleeding, tingling, abnormal blood tests, or other body symptoms
- If you did not receive antivenom, you do not need follow-up blood tests after going home.

If you are bitten in the future (or know someone who is):

- Do not wait for symptoms to appear. Symptoms can develop quickly and may become serious if not treated right away.
- 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 since serious complications can appear. Cover or wrap the wound loosely with a clean, dry bandage.
- Do not tie off the bite, do not use a tourniquet, do not apply ice, do not cut the bite and do not attempt to remove the venom.
- Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen sodium which increase bleeding risk.
- Do not try to catch the snake. Remember its color and shape for identification and take a picture from a safe distance.

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/

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>