



The very nature of the programs in the Boy Scouts of America takes us into the outdoors and the habitats of an immense variety of wildlife and creatures, great and small. Among them are venomous and non-venomous snakes, and it is especially important to “be prepared” with the knowledge of the types of venomous snakes you may encounter and how to recognize them. Do not disturb snakes or other wildlife; though snakes usually try to avoid humans, they may strike if they sense danger. Remember: they are not intruding in our habitat, but we are intruding in theirs.

Rattlesnakes are found all across the United States, and copperheads east of the Rocky Mountains. Cottonmouths, or water moccasins, inhabit the wetland areas in the South, and coral snakes are found in the wooded, sandy, or marshy areas of the South, with a desert species also in Arizona and New Mexico.

Timber rattlesnake

## Types of Venomous Snakes in the United States

### Coral Snakes



### Pit Vipers



Copperhead



Sidewinder rattlesnake



Cottonmouth/  
water moccasin

### Incident Review #1

An 18-year-old camp staff member was bitten several times by a copperhead as she attempted to catch a snake for “show and tell” for the ecology program at camp.

#### Key Points

- Live specimens are best observed at a trip to the zoo. In this case, the *Scouts BSA Handbook* has color photographs to help with identification.
- Being able to distinguish between venomous and non-venomous snakes in the areas you play, work, or travel is a potentially life-saving skill. “Do not disturb the wildlife” and “leave no trace” are appropriate mottos when dealing with snakes.

### Incident Review #2

An 18-year-old who was participating in an Order of the Arrow Ordeal Weekend almost stepped on a copperhead. As a second Scout held the snake down with a crossbow, the 18-year-old tried to kill the snake with a rock but was bitten on the hand.

#### Key Points

- Look carefully for wildlife where you place your feet and before you sit down on the ground, on rocks, or on logs.
- A good rule of thumb is to be able to see where you are putting your hands or feet.
- Most snakebites occur when people are trying to handle or kill the snake.
- If you or someone else is bitten by a venomous snake, seek medical attention immediately instead of attempting your own treatment.

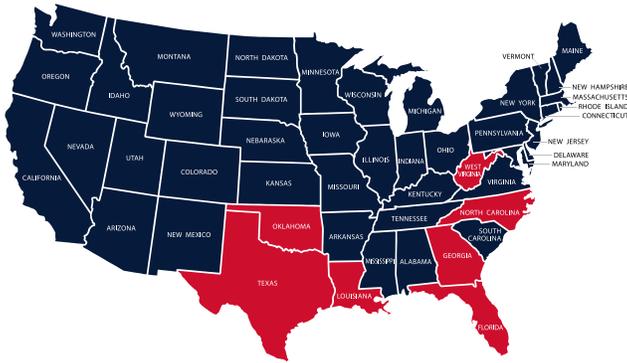
“ It has been said that the best snake bite kit is a set of car keys.”

— Dr. William Forgey



## States With Most Venomous Bites

- Texas
- Florida
- Georgia
- Louisiana
- North Carolina
- Oklahoma
- West Virginia



## Incident Review #3

A 7-year-old Cub Scout was bitten by a snake while walking through tall grass. The Scout was wearing sandals.

### Key Points

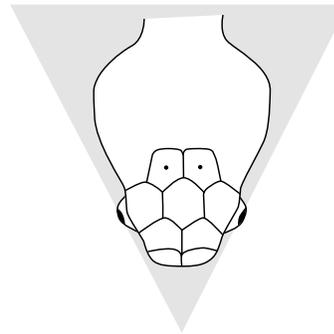
- It's a good practice to use a hiking stick to poke among the brush ahead of you when you walk through areas where snakes are.
- Stay on trails whenever possible to minimize the possibilities of confronting snakes.
- Closed-toed shoes are certainly the appropriate footwear for snake country.



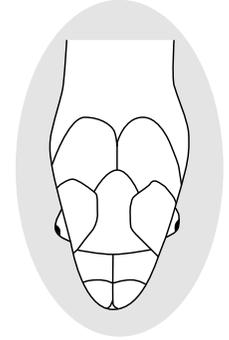
## Discussion Questions

- How can you recognize the difference between a venomous and a nonvenomous snake?

### Types of Head Shapes Venomous versus Nonvenomous



Venomous snake



Nonvenomous snake

A quick way to identify most venomous snakes is to look for a triangular head. Regardless of its appearance, it is best to leave all snakes alone. Remember: Leave no trace.

- What can you do to avoid venomous snakes in the outdoors?
- What kinds of venomous snakes live near your camp?
- What are the basic first-aid skills for caring for a snakebite, both venomous and nonvenomous?
- If you encounter a snake, what steps can you take to prevent being bitten?

## Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes/](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes/)
- American Association of Poison Control Centers, [www.aapcc.org/press/61/](http://www.aapcc.org/press/61/)