

Snake Bites and Pets, The signs and what to do in the event of a bite

It is summer in Colorado and while that means fun in the sun be aware we are not the only ones out enjoying the warm weather. The prairie rattlesnake is roaming its hunting grounds. The same grounds many of us enjoy with our four-legged companions. Sadly, many innocent “curious introductions” end in a snake bite and a frantic trip to the veterinarian.

Keep your pet(s) safe with a few helpful tips:

1. Keep a close eye on dog(s) during walks. Leash walks only are recommended in high risk areas
2. Try to limit outings to cooler times of day but be aware that snakes may still be out and moving slowly, making them less apt to warn prior to a bite
3. There is a snake bite vaccine available. However there is some question to its efficacy. A veterinarian is the best resource for vaccine questions



Pika's bite was high up on her neck, under her collar. Note the wound site and size.

Even the best prevention can fail and sometimes the bite occurs without anyone having seen the sn[Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

ake. Signs to look for if a bite is suspected:

1. Fang marks. Punctures that drain a port wine colored substance
2. There is typically swelling and bruising around the site and the animal will be incredibly painful, the swelling and bruising often spreads as venom takes effect
3. Due to pain, the pet will most likely act “not itself” may be whimpering and even aggressive. Be careful when handling a pet suspected or known to have been bitten



Pika after bite. Note red bruising. In this picture she is actually asking to have her belly rubbed.

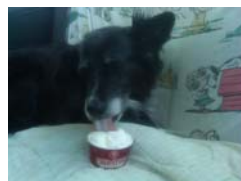
What NOT to do if your pet has been bitten:

1. Do not try to suck out the venom or aspirate
2. Do not use a tourniquet
3. Do not use alcohol, incise or place ice on the site

If your pet has been bitten seek medical attention immediately. Prompt therapy lessens but does not necessarily mean your pet will not suffer irreversible tissue and organ damage. Your pet's best defense against a snake bite is being aware of your surroundings and should the worst occur, your ability to act quickly and get them to a veterinary clinic that carries the Antivenin. Be prepared. Know which veterinarians in your area have the Antivenin in stock at all times, most twenty-four hours emergency specialists/critical care facilities do. Remember it is our responsibility to keep our pet(s) safe. Having the knowledge and proper resources helps us help them in their time of need.

Thank you to Dr. Matt Booth, DVM and the amazing staff at Alpenglow Veterinary Specialty + Emergency Center in Boulder, CO for caring for my dog following a snake bite and for contributing the information in this article.

-Nicole A. Musmanno



Pika enjoying cake batter and cheesecake Cold Stone on her way home from the vet. Minus a bad shave job, you would never know anything happened.