

# PRESS RELEASE

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**About Adaptation Environmental Services-** we are a local environmental consulting company whose mission is “to create positive experiences with wildlife.” Our team and partners have researched and worked with rattlesnakes for over 20 years on the Front Range. We continue to work with local agencies, universities and veterinarians to educate people about rattlesnakes and keep them safe.

## RATTLESNAKE SAFETY

***SAFETY ALERT:*** Rattlesnake daytime activity expected to increase for the next four to six weeks as they emerge from winter dens and begin seasonal movements.

**Denver, CO, April 24, 2019**— This week’s weather is wonderful! It’s time for spring-cleaning and prepping gardens for spring flowers and summer produce. Hiking and biking trails are also a great way to enjoy this time of year at our many Parks and Open Spaces in the metro area. Have fun, but be safe and prepared for whatever your activity may be. It’s also a great time of year to accidentally bump into Prairie rattlesnakes. As temperatures start to rise, prairie rattlesnakes are beginning to emerge from their dens looking to bask in the sun and begin seasonal movements. People may see prairie rattlesnakes on or near trails this time of year. It is important to know what to look out for and what to do if you encounter this venomous snake.

How to identify a Prairie rattlesnake- Prairie rattlesnakes are the only venomous snakes that occur along Colorado’s Front Range. Their peak activity is from April-October, but it is not uncommon to see them out during a warm winter day. As the days get hotter, nighttime activity will increase (on days from mid 80’s and higher). There are a few tell-tale signs to determine if the snake you encounter is dangerous or not: prairie rattlesnakes have a head that is clearly distinct from its neck, thick bodies, and their tails end bluntly instead of tapering down to the end, and of course, a rattle. However, the rattle could appear to be missing if the snake is young or it was removed due to injury. There is a black band at the base of the tail (**Refer to the pictures below in “Photo I.D.” section**).

How to stay safe in rattlesnake territory- Prairie rattlesnakes’ number one defense is camouflage and remaining still; it is likely you could walk by a snake and never notice it. A prairie rattlesnake prefers to go unnoticed unless it detects a threat, which is when they start to rattle their tail. If you hear a

rattlesnake, the best thing to do is to locate the snake and slowly back away. Sudden movements can be perceived as a threat to the snake, so it is best to give it time and space to move away. Other ways to reduce your risk of a rattlesnake encounter are:

- wear closed-toe shoes
- stay on designated trails
- keep your dog leashed
- look where you place your hands and feet especially in rocky and woody areas
- be aware of surroundings and keep one earbud out
- lastly, never attempt to handle or move a rattlesnake yourself.

According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife (1), a third of snakebite victims were bitten because they tried to handle or kill the snake themselves. Rattlesnakes are considered game species in Colorado and hunting season occurs from June 15<sup>th</sup> - August 15<sup>th</sup> (2). However, if you deem yourself, your pet or a family member are in a life-threatening situation the snake can be killed. Nonetheless, the safest thing to do is to not handle the snake yourself and call for a removal or allow it to move on its own.

If you are bitten by a rattlesnake- According to the CDC (3) and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (1) here is what to do if you or someone you're with are bitten by a rattlesnake:

**DO:**

- CALL 911 or other emergency services
- Remain calm and in a safe place,
- Keep area bitten by snake at or below heart level
- Remove any rings, bracelets or other items that could restrict blood flow

**DO NOT:**

- Consume alcohol or caffeine,
- Use a tourniquet,
- Slash the wound with a knife,
- Suck the venom out (with your mouth or by using a Venom Extraction kit),
- Apply ice or immerse bitten area in water

If your pet is bitten- move your pet to a safe location, if possible, carry your pet to reduce activity, take them to a veterinary hospital and call ahead to ensure the vet is prepared and if not, where to go instead.

**Common myths involving rattlesnakes-**

*MYTH:* Your neighbor claims he saw a cottonmouth in his backyard.

**FACT:** Rattlesnakes, specifically Prairie rattlesnakes, are the only venomous snake in the Colorado Front Range. There are no cottonmouths, copperheads, Mojave rattlesnakes or Western diamondback rattlesnakes that live in Colorado (1).

*MYTH:* Your uncle told you a rattlesnake once chased him when he was a kid.

**FACT:** Rattlesnakes do not chase people; however, they look for an escape route which can be perceived as them moving towards you. Keep in mind rattlesnakes are also decent swimmers when out in areas with open water or where swimming may occur.

*MYTH:* Your grandma always warned you about baby rattlesnakes being more dangerous than adult ones because they cannot control how much venom they inject and/or it is more concentrated compared to an adult's venom.

**FACT:** A rattlesnake bite is serious no matter what. Bites vary from snake to snake, there is no distinct difference between a juvenile and adult bite.

Photo I.D.- Comparison photos of a venomous Prairie rattlesnake and non-venomous bullsnake, both are common along the Colorado Front Range and often confused.



Prairie rattlesnakes (left) have vertical pupils and white facial stripes. There is also a facial pit located between the nostril and eye. Non-venomous bullsnakes (right) have round pupils, no facial pit and lack white facial stripes. (Photographs provided by Adaptation Environmental Services.)



Prairie rattlesnakes (left) have a blunt tail and a black band at the base of the tail. Their head is a distinct triangular shape with a thick body and their scales are keeled giving them a rough, dull appearance. Non-venomous bullsnakes (right) have a less defined head and neck, slender bodies and a tapered tail. When defensive, a bullsnake will flatten its head to appear more triangular and "rattle" its tail against various surfaces. (Photographs provided by Adaptation Environmental Services)

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If you have any questions or would like more information on this topic, please visit our website [adaptationenvironmental.com](http://adaptationenvironmental.com) or contact us at [info@adaptationenvironmental.com](mailto:info@adaptationenvironmental.com)

#### Citations

- (1) CPW- Rattlesnake Management- Stewardship Prescription. (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/ResourceStewardship/RattlesnakeManagementPrescription.pdf>
- (2) CDC- Venomous Snakes- NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes/symptoms.html>
- (3) CPW- Small Game Dates and Fees. (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://cpw.state.co.us/thingstodo/Pages/SmallGameDatesFees.aspx>