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Snake dangers

October 27, 2011, By Cheryl Smyth, ARTICLE, HEALTH

I watch my dog, 'Tessi,' as she finds a harmless garter snake in the grass. She obeys when I command her to Leave It. I am satisfied she is well trained, despite her strong prey drive. When we travel, however, is she prepared enough to ignore a venomous snake before it bites her?

WHERE ARE THEY?

We only deal with non-venomous snakes in the part of Ontario where we live, though regions inhabited by deadly snakes are scattered across Canada.

The endangered Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake inhabits the shorelines of Georgian Bay and a few other small areas of Ontario. These shy creatures will only bite if cornered, and would rather flee.

A few rattlesnake species inhabit parts of the western provinces. As with the Massasauga, the possibility of encountering one is rare. Human intrusion on their natural habitat has decreased their numbers.

The warning sound of the rattle extended from the rattlesnake's tail would alert an intruder to its presence. Its diamond-shaped head, facial pits, and cat-like eyes confirm its identity.

SNAKES IN THE STATES

A myriad of pit vipers – rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths – flourish throughout the United States. Most live in the southern regions. Also making their homes in the south are the small, brightly coloured Banded Coral Snakes with their slender heads and bodies. Their reclusive and nocturnal personalities keep sightings and attacks to a minimum. Learn more about identifying these venomous snakes on snakegetters.com.

When crossing the border, and especially if you have a winter home in the south, it's important to consider the risk venomous snakes pose to you and your pets.

ARE SNAKEBITES LIFE-THREATENING?

To varying degrees, depending on the species, snakes prefer to avoid attacking if possible. Some show more aggression than others. A snake, no matter its temperament, will strike in defense if it feels trapped.

Whether the bite proves fatal or not depends on the type of snake and the strength of its venom. Other variables include whether it injects a significant amount of venom or none at all, or how and when the wound is taken care of, and the size and health of the dog.

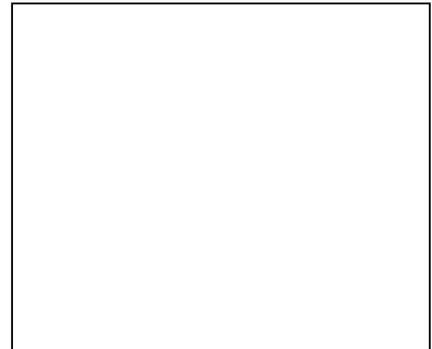
AVOIDANCE

Since deadly snakes are uncommon in Canada, keeping your dog leashed and watching where his curious nose leads him should keep him safe. Teaching him to ignore the reptiles offers more certainty. For those spending time in the southern states, taking your dog for

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snake aversion training may lower his chances of a disastrous encounter. Many classes and clinics, using a variety of methods – mostly with the help of an electronic collar (e-collar) – are taught in the states. It is advisable to research trainers carefully to find one who uses proper, humane techniques.

WHAT TO DO

If your dog suffers a bite, seek medical help as quickly as possible. Keeping him calm and restricting his movements will slow down the spread of venom in his body. For more pointers, read the [peteducation.com](#) article on [firsts aid for snake bites in dogs](#).

Phone the vet ahead to confirm they stock anti-venom, it can be expensive and not all of clinics carry it. If it's not available, there are other ways vets can alleviate the impact of envenomation.

By keeping these tips in mind, Tessi and I will be prepared for our travels in dangerous snake country.

RELATED READING

[Spiders and snakes dogs should avoid](#)

[Wildlife hazards in Canada](#)

[Diseases in the southern U.S.](#)

[Cheryl Smyth](#) has been a photographer for 20 years and a writer for a few. The desire of having her dog, Tessi, with her on her travels has inspired her to discover and write about all that pet travel has to offer.

Photo: Dave King© / Dorling Kindersley

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