



Snakes, Snakebites and Your Dog

By Cherie Weaver

One of the unpleasant aspects of desert living is that several hundred Phoenix-Tucson area dogs are bitten by rattlesnakes each year. Luckily, most victims will survive the ordeal, but many will suffer permanent tissue damage, and some will die.

When a dog is bitten, rapid swelling takes place within the first few minutes as the enzymes in the venom start to digest tissue at the bite location. Your dog's treatment may include intravenous fluids and treatment for shock and pain; the dog may also require antivenin injections and medication for infection. Most animals will survive with quick treatment, but the best remedy for snakebite is prevention.

Snakebite tragedies are avoidable and pet owners are encouraged to follow these steps to keep their dogs safe from harm:

- A sturdy leash and your vigilance are the best ways to ensure your pet's safety. Loose dogs are in danger of being bitten, and so are you if your dog disturbs a snake.
- When walking your dog, stay on open paths or trails where snakes can be more easily seen.
- Avoid nighttime walks in desert areas, as rattlesnakes are nocturnal during most of the year.
- If you should hear a rattlesnake, be sure to keep your dog close to you; move away from the snake as soon as you visually determine its location.
- Should your dog seem to be unusually interested in something hidden in the brush, quickly back off until you know what it is.
- Don't allow dogs to explore holes in the ground or dig under logs, flat rocks or other debris where snakes may be hidden. Keep your yard clean and free of these potential hiding places to help discourage the presence of snakes.

Additional Options:

- Consider taking your dog to a qualified trainer who will teach your dog to avoid snakes. Be aware, this training does involve shock collars so be very sure you go to a qualified trainer who is recommended by your Vet or someone you trust.
- Talk to your Vet about the new Rattlesnake vaccination that you can have administered to your dog, so that if he/she is bit by a rattlesnake the affects will be minimized.

Should a snake bit your pet, follow these steps:

- Try to identify the snake by making note of its size, color pattern, and the presence or absence of a rattle at the end of the tail.
- Check your dog thoroughly for bite marks---more than one wound may be present.
- If your dog is bitten on a leg, snugly wrap a constricting band on the affected limb at a level just above the bite wound (on the body side of the wound). This band could be fashioned of a shirtsleeve or other fabric, and should be snug, but not excessively tight.
- Keep the dog as quiet as possible and immediately transport it to you emergency veterinarian-hospital.