

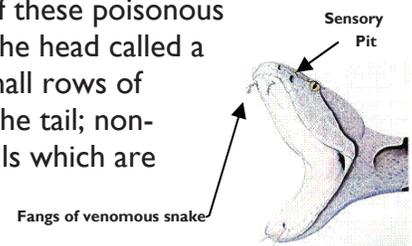
# PoisonSafe Practices

Cut this public education article out of every issue to copy and distribute or post for your clientele!

Many people dislike or misunderstand snakes. Irrational fears come from these misunderstandings and superstitions which have been handed down from one generation to the next. Although one should definitely respect poisonous snakes and approach with caution, remember that many snakes are harmless and beneficial because they eat insects, mice and other rodents. Many snakes will bite when threatened or surprised, but most will usually avoid an encounter if possible and only bite as a last resort. Snakes found in and near water are frequently mistaken as being poisonous. The majority of venomous snake bites can be prevented simply by not trying to capture or handle the snakes. Copperheads, by nature, are not aggressive. They do not go after people, do not search for people to bite and would rather stay motionless and undetected or try to avoid an intruder. Most snake bites will not be life threatening, but unless you are absolutely sure that you know the species, treat it seriously, and call the Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

## **NAKE BITES POISONOUS OR NOT?**

Most of the fifty species and subspecies of snakes found in Missouri are harmless, but there are five species which are poisonous. The Copperhead is the most common poisonous snake followed by the Water Moccasin or Cottonmouth, and three different rattlesnakes. All of these poisonous snakes are pit vipers, which means they have an opening on each side of the head called a sensory pit. Poisonous snakes have fangs; non-poisonous snakes have small rows of teeth. Poisonous snakes have a single row of scales on the underside of the tail; non-poisonous snakes have two rows of scales. The pit viper's eyes have pupils which are elliptical in shape or the vertical shape like a cat's eyes.



### TIPS TO AVOID SNAKEBITES

- Stay away from areas where snakes likely live.
- Be cautious while hiking, especially around large rocks or logs. Wear protective shoes or boots. Consider using a walking stick when hiking.
- Do not place your hands under rocks or logs; tap the top of logs before stepping over them.
- Wear rubber boots when fishing in streams that may harbor the venomous Cottonmouth.
- Contact the Missouri Department of Conservation for more information and facts about Missouri snakes.

### FIRST AID FOR POISONOUS SNAKE BITES

- Remain calm.
- Do not try to capture the snake.
- Note time of the bite, and remove all tight clothing or jewelry which may delay or hide swelling.
- Call the Poison Center immediately at 1-800-222-1222 for instructions on all snake bites.
- Immobilize the limb or body part at or slightly below heart level.
- Wash the bite area with soap and water.
- **DO NOT** use ice or a tourniquet.
- **DO NOT** cut over the fang marks and try to suck out the venom.
- Transport the patient to the closest hospital.